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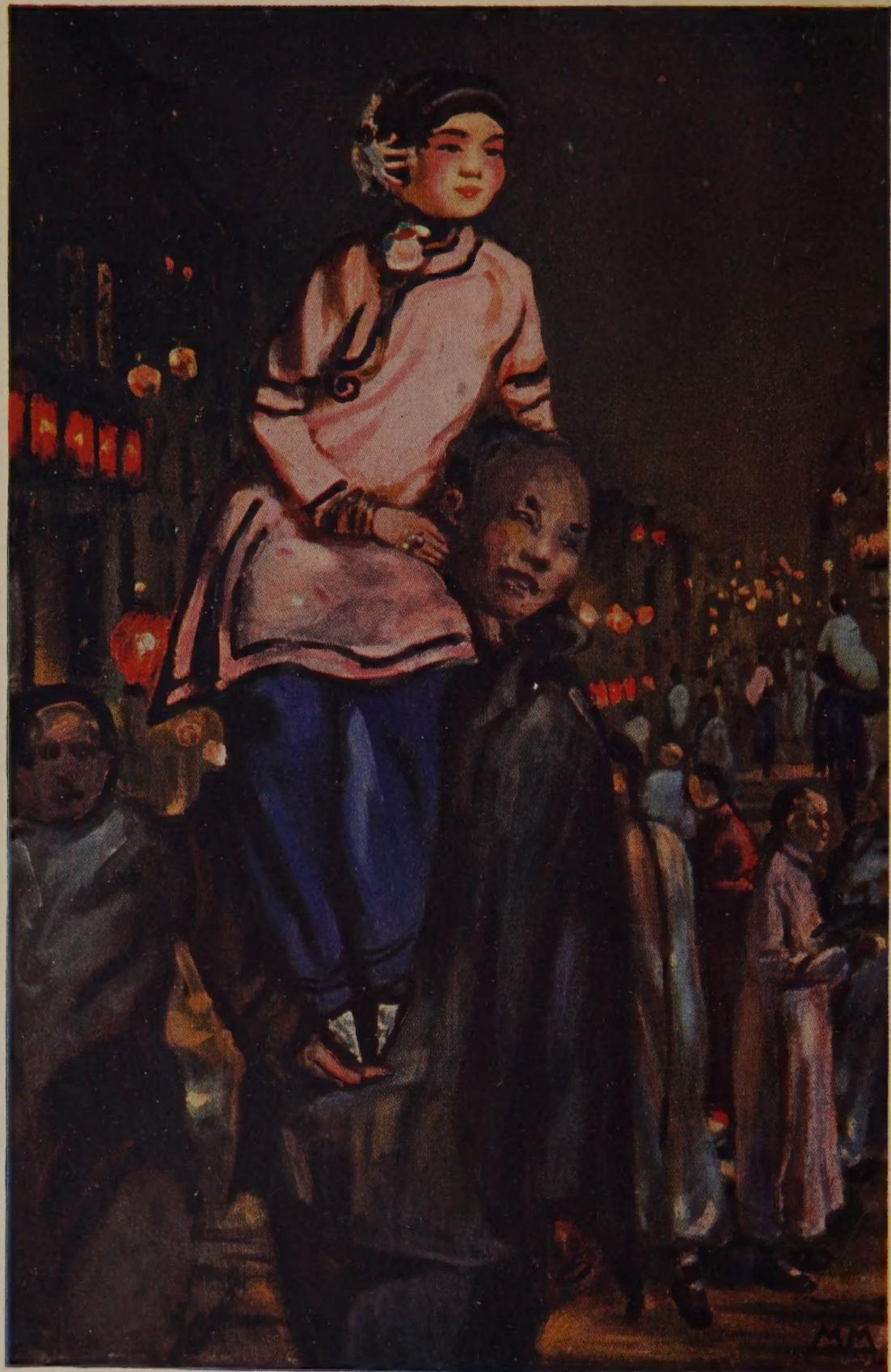
SOMETHING LIGHTER

Most of these stories originally appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine*. By the courteous permission of the Editor of that journal they are now republished. "The Black Cart" was originally published in China.



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# SOMETHING LIGHTER

BY  
F. G. P. BLAND

MEI LING, BORNE HIGH ON THE SHOULDER OF HER STALWART  
SERVING-MAN

*From the painting by Mary Macleod*

MARY MACLEOD

BOSTON AND NEW YORK  
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY



# SOMETHING LIGHTER

BY  
J. O. P. BLAND

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
MARY MACLEOD

BOSTON AND NEW YORK  
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## IN MEMORIAM

IN the soft lingering twilight of an Irish summer's day, two years ago, I was idly browsing amongst the books of the ancestral library, opening here and there a volume whose venerable, battered frame recalled to memory days and old familiar faces of the distant past. Through the open window, looking out across blue waters to the emerald coast of Down, came the scent of new-mown grass and trellised roses swaying to the breeze. Beyond the sea wall enclosing the garden, I could hear the voices and laughter of village children, bathing amongst the rocks. In the fir trees by the gate lodge, the rooks were gathering to their evening parliament, amidst excursions and alarms, just as their forbears did in the days, long ago, when they and I went to bed at the same hour. A peaceful scene, filled with the fragrance of happy memories. Seated in his arm-chair by the window, the General (then in his ninety-third year) had put away his rug-making, lit a fresh pipe and was proceeding to read and inwardly digest the latest uncomfortable words of the *Morning Post* on the subject of the Free State.

In a prominent position of the central bookshelf (evidently intended to catch the visitors' eye) all neatly in a row, were half a score of my own stolid tomes—undeniable evidence, at all events, of filial piety and parental pride. Absent-

mindedly, I took one of these volumes from its place (a monstrous weighty thing, compiled in 1912) and turning its pages at random, soon found myself enjoying their fine flavour in the spirit of intelligent appreciation common to all authors under similar circumstances. Caviare to the general, was it? Very likely. Too long-winded? For those who must needs run as they read, very possibly. Nevertheless, for the small company of the elect, a fine thing. In any case, mine own. Thus, in my mind, I made amends to the ungainly tome for the lamentable fact that it had never attained to the dignity of a second edition. It was at this point that my gently wandering mind became suddenly aware of the amazing truth that, except for a few pages at the very beginning and the very end, the leaves of this particular masterpiece had never been cut. Written, be it observed, in 1912.

There is much virtue in a cold douche: the shock may be severe, but the reaction is bracing. This one served most effectively to dispel the vapours of complacency and to remind me of the inglorious rôle appointed to all minor prophets in their own country. Nevertheless, the occasion seemed to call for some comment, to justify a little persiflage.

"Father," I said, introducing the huge yellow-covered volume between him and his newspaper, "what did you think of this book? Did you like it?"

Discarding the paper, he took it from me and thoughtfully examined its title.

"A fine book," he said—"a very fine book. What always puzzles me is how you managed to remember it all."

"Well, dad, what puzzles me is, how you all managed to read it without cutting the leaves."

The old gentleman, smoking very hard, proceeded to verify the horrid fact. The impeachment was not to be denied : nevertheless, during the brief moment when he faced it, I felt myself to be the guilty party. Finally, closing the book, he passed it back to me.

"To tell you the truth," he confessed, "I've tried more than once, but I really can't follow the ins and outs of Chinese politics. Those awful names of theirs are too much for me ; I simply can't remember which is which. It's a good book, I know—the papers said so—but all the same I've often wished you could manage to write something lighter. Why not some short stories ? "

"All right, father—I'll see what can be done. I'll try and produce something lighter."

---

Which explains and (whatever their defects) may justify the genesis of these tales. But alas, for all our best-laid schemes ! Only two of these stories had been published before the General passed beyond this veil of delusion. I am glad to remember that these two met with his cordial approval, for it was chiefly to please him that they were written. The rest are dedicated to his kindly memory.

J. O. P. BLAND.

*July, 1924.*



## PART I

### The Ivory Buddha

SOONER or later, to every man, there comes a time when his day-dreams turn more readily to the past than to the future, when the latest map upon the wall calls up remembrances of things past rather than new visions of long trails and quests that are never done. Sooner or later Odysseus wearies of the wine-dark sea and finds increasing comfort in the thought of his own hearthstone, where the song of the sirens, mingling with the soothing murmur of Penelope's distaff, shall come but as the memory of some distant music, bitter-sweet. Grudgingly or gracefully, the *wanderlust*, like love and the fine frenzy of the poet's soul, yields to the insidious hand of Time. Here and there some superman, like Goethe or Tolstoy, or Pliny the Elder, may succeed in preserving something of the divine fire unquenched by years, pursuing the spirit of Romance with stout heart in spite of rheumatic joints ; but the general run of mankind, having weathered the roaring 'forties and the fattening 'fifties, are content to drift gently into leisurely fireside habits and to confine their wanderings to well-beaten tracks, wherein creature comforts may be found. True it is, that they keep their youth the longest

and savour best the wine of life, in whom the *wanderlust* persists in spite of years ; and their treasure-house of memories is the richer for every added year of traffics and discoveries. But to all, sooner or later, comes a day when the spirit no longer moves one to revisit the glimpses of adventurous moons, when, as the rain drives in fierce gusts against the curtained pane, we snuggle down into our easiest arm-chair and thank Heaven that to-night we go not down to the sea in ships. And fortunate he who, when that day comes, has gathered from his wanderings, to brighten the horizon of that easy-chair, some salvage and flotsam of memorable times and tides—pictures or bric-à-brac, what you will, the strange gods of the heathen or the skins of beasts—things that shall recall to mind the touch of kindly vanished hands, the sights and sounds of old familiar haunts.

I am one of those fortunate ones, *moi qui vous parle*, for from my easy chair, when in lazy mood or weary of the chimney-pots and back gardens of Kensington, my meditative eye can wander gratefully around and about a little walled world, wherein pictures and curios and books summon spirits at my bidding from all the Seven Seas, and conjure visions of the fading years. Narrow enough, in terms of space, this horizon of shelves and walls, yet, with the help of memory's magic carpet, a great gateway that discovers all the whole wide world, and "charmed magic casements opening on the foam of perilous seas." A tale of many wanderings and sojournings in distant lands is told on these four walls, but its dominant and ever-recurring note is that of Far Cathay. It begins in the 'eighties, with "Chinese Gordon's" large red visiting-card, bearing its laconic superscription

of introduction to the favourable notice of the great Li Hung-chang—a scrap of paper (that was never presented, for reasons that have nothing to do with this story) which helped to beguile me straightway from Trinity, Dublin, to the Customs students' quarters in the old Kou-Lan *hutung* at Peking. Then comes the miscellaneous jetsam of thirteen years in the service of His Majesty Kuang Hsü, years of travail (which the locusts have eaten), spent between Hankow, Canton, and Peking, with occasional furloughs in Korea and Japan ; several mementoes of the lotus-eating days, before Russia came down through Manchuria with her grey-clad legions and railways, when the East still slumbered and the Old Buddha from the Dragon Throne gave peace in her time. Later on there are milestones of Shanghai days, when we saw the dogs of war let loose, first by the Boxers, and then in the grim struggle which ended with the Rising Sun flying once more at Port Arthur and the Russians driven back to Harbin. Sketches by Willard Straight and M'Cormick recall the nipping eager air of Manchuria and the long Siberian trail. Also there are pictures of house-boats and up-river scenes and tree-girt temples nestling in the hills, very grateful to the retrospective eye ; and good honest Chinese faces, that bring to mind, with the fragrance of the gardens of one's youth, all the simple kindliness and dog-like fidelity of their race. Every curio, every picture, has its story, from the *mille-fleurs* jar (an excellent imitation) presented to me with much ceremony by an astute Minister of State, to the Ming scroll of the Four Wise Elders, given me by old Sung, the curio dealer of the Soochow *hutung*, to commemorate his emergence, safe and sound,

from the terrors of Towns's opium cure, taken at my urgent advice. And then, most precious of all, because of its emanations of perfect serenity, is the Ivory Buddha on his dais of lacquer and gold, as ineffably unconscious of the fretful penalties of material existence here in London as he was in the little shrine of the Po Yün Kuan, where, for three hundred years and more, incense and the prayers of the faithful were offered up before him.

It is over a quarter of a century since he left that little shrine to become an honoured member of my household, but age cannot wither nor custom stale the august restfulness, the mysterious time-defying charm, which the art of a great craftsman has wrought into the features of the ivory god. The first time that I saw him, his face reminded me of two others—La Gioconda and the Sphinx—which, because they both express (while seeming to have solved for themselves) the riddle of existence, appeal eternally and universally to the hearts of men. But the virtue which radiates from the mystic serenity of Amida *in partibus* exceeds that of either Monna Lisa or the Dreamer in the desert, even as Karma is greater than life itself.

"Perfectly extinct upon his throne," as the Sutra of the Lotus of the Good Law hath it, the Ivory Buddha contemplates me from his place of honour by my hearthstone with an air of gentle and benevolent detachment, carrying my mind back to those Buddha-fields of Northern China where long ago I gleaned something of the teachings of the Selfless One, something of the eternal mystery of the Circle of Illusion and the shoreless seas of Birth and Death. As I gaze at him, softly glistening in the firelight, memories of those days come crowding ; golden days, when every excur-

sion into the unknown world of the wise old East was a glorious adventure, where Romance lay ever in waiting at the next bend of the road, and mystery lurked behind every grey wall. Once again, like wine in the blood, comes the thrill that one knew at first discovering the charm of existence in China's ancient capital, that subtle charm which still lingers, like that of melodies unheard, with a magic all its own. Once again I hear the choir invisible of Peking's pigeons whirling, with music in their wings, and can feel the tingling glory of an autumn morning, as in the days when I used to ride out through the Hsi Pien Men with O'Hara, to our summer quarters and stables in a temple hard by the race-course.

Amidst the sunlit memories of those days, when first I made acquaintance with the Ivory Buddha, and resolved, if it were possible, to become his owner (or rather, I should say, his host), two faces stand out clearly—old Chang, the genial Abbot of the Po Yün Kuan, and Torginsky, the soft-footed silent Russian with the face of a holy apostle and the mind of a Metternich, commonly known to us, his colleagues of the Customs Inspectorate, as the “Living Buddha.”

Old Chang I had known, in a casual way, for some years before that summer when O'Hara and I got into the way of dropping in on him for a cup of tea and a chat on our way to the race-course. A sociable old fellow he was, full of wise saws and old wives' tales, and a good Buddhist as Chinese priests go, well learned in the sacred books, and devout in the performance of his duties ; but, like many of his brethren of the contemplative creed, a hardened opium-smoker. It was this weakness, combined with the dwindling revenues of the

temple, which occasionally compelled him to raise the wind by selling unconsidered trifles of ecclesiastical property—old scrolls and Buddhas, and vestments of soft-tinted brocade. He had even sold the *cloisonné* candlesticks from the altar to an American globe-trotter, and replaced them by cheap Soochow brasses. I myself had bought from him an eight-armed Kuanyin of sandalwood and a couple of those somewhat gruesome blood-shot sacrificial bowls, which are made from the crania of priests, decapitated *in articulo mortis*. But despite many tactful overtures on my part, he had steadily refused to part with the Ivory Buddha ; it was, he said, a precious thing, inscribed on the official list of the Temple's treasures since the days of Chien Lung, the work of the same famous artist who had carved the great standing Buddha of the Huang Kung. He used to keep it carefully wrapped up in a bit of old yellow silk, under lock and key, in the big chest which stood by the stove-bed in his inner chamber, and only brought it out on solemn occasions to stand in its appointed place beside the central incense-burner. Thus he avoided temptation for himself, and for the Blessed One the increasing risks of abduction by the hand of the ungodly.

But Torginsky, of course, knew more about the Ivory Buddha and all the other treasures of the shrine (including old Chang's tin of Patna) than the Abbot himself. A mysterious fellow, Torginsky, even in those early days ; a strange mixture, typically Russian, of the ascetic and the voluptuary ; a dreamer and a schemer, a Don Quixote and a semi-political *savant*. All Oriental languages seemed to come to him as a matter of inherited instinct, and his spiritual home was obviously among

Asiatics rather than with Europeans. Indeed, he moved in the cosmopolitan world of Peking's diplomatic society and amidst the dry formalities of official routine like some distinguished and affable, but undeniably bored, stranger at a bourgeois entertainment. Only occasionally he joined, so to speak, in our procession and became occidentally human ; notably so when, under the influence of what Shaw calls the "life force," he would forsake his usual haunts and hobbies among the natives and throw himself, with exaggerated and romantic devotion, at the feet of some fair lady who had taken his erratic and fastidious fancy. But even in these moments of expansion, or when briefly beguiled by convivial occasions and heart-warming wine, there was always about him an elusive and exotic quality, an aloofness, which precluded any approach to intimacy even by those who knew him best. *Per contra*, his Chinese name was a household word with every tea-house gossip, every camel-driver, and every beggar in Peking. Even to-day (as I had occasion recently to learn), in the curio-shops of the Liu Li-chang and in the slumbrous courtyards of the temples in and about Peking, the older generation still speaks of "Tao Laoyeh" with the respect which Orientals always pay to the inscrutable. Indeed, after his characteristically mysterious disappearance into the Mongolian wilds, somewhat later than the time of which I write, he became almost a legendary figure in the little Chinese world which lives around and upon the foreign Legations at Peking, a figure which gradually took on a reputation for superhuman wisdom and mystic virtues. There were, of course, very real qualities, generally unsuspected by most of us, to account for the deep mark which he undoubtedly made

upon the native mind ; also, there were ambitions and definitely-formed purposes behind that Don Quixote expression, that gift of timely silence, and possibly beneath certain of his somewhat peculiar habits, such as that of dispensing copper-cash largesse from a bag carried by a native servant to the crowd of beggars and loafers that always followed him on his walks abroad. If Japan had not been successful in driving Russia from Manchuria, if Mouravieff's dream had been fulfilled, as it was meant to be, by the plots and plans of Alexieff, Pavlow, Wogack, and the rest, Mongolia would assuredly have become a very bright gem in the Tsar's Oriental diadem ; and Torginsky would have made an ideal semi-Oriental satrap for a viceregal court at Urga. But that, as Kipling says, is another story.

I have said that Torginsky knew all about our friend the Abbot and the dwindling treasures of the Po Yün Kuan. If old Chang had ever suspected the extent and depth of that knowledge—well, the Ivory Buddha would probably never have come my way. It would either have remained to gladden the eyes of the faithful, or it would have been added to Torginsky's unique collection of Buddhistic antiquities, and thus eventually have passed into the hands of the Moscow magnate to whom, with a *beau geste* of indifference, Torginsky sold the lot as a souvenir of the said magnate's first journey by the Trans-Siberian line. But old Chang only knew the silent, courteous Russian as a foreigner curiously well versed in Buddhist lore, and one whose visits were welcomed with respect by every temple dignitary in the north, from the Huang Kung to the Eastern Tombs. Had he not been received in audience by the Dalai Lama

himself, and was he not known to be in frequent communication with the Living Buddha of Ulias-sutai? The guardians of the small suburban shrines treated him accordingly with remarkable deference, and the prices at which he could acquire relics and temple gear were ridiculously low.

It was the dusk of a sultry evening in July, when O'Hara and I were chatting over our coffee and cigars among the oleanders and pomegranates of our Temple courtyard, that old Chang put in a sheepish appearance, walking delicately, and bearing a message which, he said, he must deliver to me in private. This message, which he took furtively from his sleeve, turned out to be the Ivory Buddha. He had made up his mind, it appeared, to accept my last offer—sixty dollars—for the reason that "the shrine was void, the altar bare," and he had not money even to buy joss-sticks. He only stipulated that my purchase must be kept secret, for a while at least, lest a bird of the air carry the matter to the seats of the mighty. So the impious deal was concluded, and old Chang shuffled off into the darkness with his sixty dollars. And next morning Amida looked out upon a world of which he had never dreamed beneath his banyan-tree—a world in which the most conspicuous objects on the painted veil were the latest efforts of Jan van Beers, a banjo and a terrier pup.

Remembering my promise to old Chang, I was just taking the ivory image from my desk and preparing to put it away in a despatch-box, when Torginsky put his head in at the door, unannounced, and his body followed it. He was in a particularly human and genial mood that morning, having fallen desperately in love, ten days before, with the latest Marchesa of the Italian Legation, one of

whose dainty gloves he was carrying about with him all day long, as Galahad might have carried the Holy Grail. He had looked in, he said, to suggest a stroll on the wall before going to the office, desiring, no doubt, to tell me all about the unrivalled charms of the lady. Then his wandering eye fell upon the Buddha. In his absent-minded way he sauntered across to my desk, without saying a word, and taking it up, carried it to the window and examined it closely.

"So," he said, "you have bought the little *foyeh* of the Po Yün Kuan? Old Chang must have been unusually hard up. What did you give for it?"

I told him the price, and asked, for the old priest's sake, that he should say nothing of the matter. Still examining the Buddha, with long-fingered hands which seemed to caress it, he agreed. Then, taking a penknife from his pocket, "You know," he said, "that these old temple pieces used often to contain jewels, wrapped up in little prayers painted on yellow silk. Nowadays the stones are generally missing. Shall we see if there are any in this *foyeh*?" Without awaiting my reply, he prized open a little square door, so microscopically cut and fitted into the veined back of the Buddha that I might never have detected it. From the tiny receptacle within he took two little scraps of mouldy orange-coloured silk, all covered with the characters for "Ah-mi-to-foh." Of jewels there was no sign. "It is always best to examine them at once," said the Russian. And with this I put away the ivory god, he took up his lady's glove, and we went for our walk on the wall.

A week later, at the lunch hour, when, as usual, the curio-dealers and silk-hawkers were spreading out their wares on the verandah of the Hsin Yüan

mess, there came a knock at my door. Having no mind to buy, I shouted "*Pu yao*" ; but the knock persisted, and was followed by the entrance of a small and frightened youth, in whom I recognised old Chang's acolyte and general factotum at the Po Yün Kuan. Stealthily closing the door behind him, he came towards me, and producing from his sleeve a dirty rag, took from it sixty dollars, which he placed upon my desk. "There is your money," he said. "The old *hoshang* could not come himself, but he bade me say that there is trouble about this business, and he begs that you will give him back the Ivory Buddha."

Now this was unusual, for in China a bargain is a bargain, even with priests. But if old Chang were telling the truth, far be it from me to get him into trouble ; at the same time, I had no desire to part with the latest and best of my Lares. All attempts to get further explanations from the lad were in vain ; he merely begged the more urgently for the return of the Buddha, and when I finally refused, burst into loud lamentations. It was only on my promising to ride out and see the priest that same evening that he consented to depart.

I found old Chang in a doggedly obstinate mood. He kept on repeating that he must have been mad to think of selling a treasure of the temple so well known to the authorities, his superiors ; that I ought not to have let him do it ; and that if I insisted on keeping the Buddha, he would be forced to say that it had been stolen. Even so, he must lose much face. Did I want to compel him to swallow opium ? If I would only give him back the ivory god, I might have anything else I liked in the shrine for a song. I knew that there was more in this than met the eye. "My friend," I said,

"keep calm. That which is sold, is sold. If you really want the Buddha back, you must tell me all the truth. What has happened? After all the temple has lost *foyehs* before now without your losing much face."

At this the old fellow proceeded to discharge his wrath-matter. Why had I not kept the matter secret, as agreed? Why, above all, had I shown the Ivory Buddha to Torginsky, a man with a devilish gift of divination? It then transpired that the very day after I had unintentionally violated the pact of secrecy, Torginsky had dropped in, quite casually, at the Po Yün Kuan and asked the Abbot, over the tea-cups, to let him examine one of the temple's old black-letter *sutras*. Then, complimenting the priest on being the trusted guardian of such treasures, he had asked to see the Ivory Buddha. "What could I say?" muttered the Abbot. "In my haste I told the first lie that came into my head. I said that thieves had broken into my inner room and had stolen the ivory image and other things. And I begged him to keep the matter secret, so that the thieves might not be frightened into leaving the city, and the stolen goods might thus perhaps be recovered in days to come."

"A good lie wasted," I replied. "I am sorry that Tao *laoyeh* saw the Buddha in my room. It was an accident, for he entered unbidden. Yet even now I cannot understand how it will save your face, old friend, if I restore the Buddha? He must know that I bought it from you."

"Even so, for when I spoke of thieves he smiled a frozen smile, and said that he knew the man to whom they had sold their plunder. 'Twas because of this knowledge that he had come to me. He

even knew that the Buddha had been sold for sixty dollars, and he offered to lend me this sum to buy it back. He said he was sure that the man who had bought it, a friend of his and a just man, would never think of keeping stolen goods ! ”

At this point I began to feel somewhat lost in the mazes of Oriental diplomacy, and to wonder what Torginsky’s little game might be ; for, in spite of his mysterious ways and poses, he was always a good sportsman and not the sort to queer another’s pitch. It certainly looked as if he wanted me to restore Amida to the shrine, but for the life of me I could not see why. It was certainly not on account of any religious or sentimental scruples.

“ *Lao hoshang*,” I said, “ this is all very interesting, but there must be more to tell. Why should Tao *laoyeh* be so anxious about your selling your treasures when he himself has collected a roomful from every shrine between Peking and Urga ? ”

“ Listen, then,” replied the old man, “ and I will tell you. That Russian, as I have said, has a devil’s gift of divination. He told me that I must buy back the Buddha, because it is recorded in the archives of the temple, of which he seems to know as much as I do, that each of the little prayer-rolls inside it contains a sapphire worth several times sixty dollars. So, you see, it is necessary that you should give me back the Buddha, in order that I may save my face.”

“ I begin to understand,” said I. “ Nevertheless, there can be no face-saving in this way, my friend, for the reason that, just as Tao *laoyeh* knew that the Buddha had not been stolen, so also he knows that there were no jewels inside it when it came into my hands. He opened it in my presence,

and I saw with my own eyes that it was empty. What purpose, therefore, will be served by my doing as you suggest ? Think again."

The Abbot sat silent for a while, furiously thinking. Twice he lit his pipe and poured himself a fresh cup of tea. Finally he sighed, as one who has done with a hard problem. "This Russian," he said, "is a strange man, and his words are as iron covered with soft silk ; nevertheless, he understands *taoli* and can talk reason. If now I tell him the whole truth, no doubt the matter can be arranged between us. Why should he wish to make trouble for me ? "

Old Chang was right. The matter was settled, in due course, and so discreetly that neither the priest nor Torginsky ever favoured me with details of the pact. All I know is, that no more attempts were made to persuade me to part with the Ivory Buddha, and that shortly afterwards a certain very beautiful Marchesa aroused the envy, hatred, and malice of all her gentle sisters in Legation circles by appearing at a five o'clock with her dainty waist encircled by a belt of kingfisher's feathers and gold filigree, fashioned in the form of a snake ; and the eyes of that glittering reptile were a pair of sapphires.

To-day, among the faithful remnant of worshippers at the Po Yün Kuan, there are still some who remember old Chang, the kindly, easy-going old Abbot with the weakness for opium, and how the worthy man was robbed of the famous Ivory Buddha and other precious treasures of the shrine. I know that this is so, for the story was told me on the occasion of my last visit to Peking, as to a stranger from afar, by the aged watchman who now opens the gate of the Temple to visitors.

He spoke very earnestly about the alarming increase of evil-doers in recent years, a phenomenon which he attributed to the passing of the Dragon Throne ; but he believes in the ultimate triumph of the *Yang* over the *Yin*, of light over darkness, and had no doubt that, just as the Emperor would some day recover the Great Inheritance, so the Ivory Buddha would be miraculously restored to its ancient place. It may be so.

For the present, however, the Buddha dwells serenely on the heights of Campden Hill, and on his lips I can discern the same elusive shadow of a smile as that which flitted in the dim religious light of the altar at the Po Yün Kuan—the gentle smile of the Compassionate One, born of the knowledge that Time and Space, and all the fitful fever of men's lives, are but as tiny ripples on the infinite Ocean of Illusion.

## A Witness in Chief

WHEN, in the early 'nineties, Chang Sun-pow, the wealthiest compradore of Shanghai, married Mei Ling, the all-too-famous singing girl from the Foochow Road, his friends and colleagues of the Canton Guild commented, with much shaking of heads and wealth of classical commentary, on the ancient truth that there's no fool like an old fool. Over bubbly pipes and dried persimmons, they quoted hoary maxims from the Sages concerning the eternal law of compensation, whereby the wealthiest and soberest of successful men may be led to look for trouble in the form of a woman. Those of his intimates who, before the event, ventured to discuss the matter with Chang himself, found him quite ready to admit the general wisdom of their arguments, but equally determined to persist in his decision to take the daughter of the vine to spouse. In substance, his defence followed the lines of the Rubaiyat and the Song of Solomon (though most probably he had never heard of either) which, when all is said and done, represent the rooted convictions of the East. For contracting a second marriage he had every justification, inasmuch as his first wife, lately deceased, had failed to provide him with heirs, and in the matter of selection he politely but firmly declined to be advised. Thus all the discussion of the matter at the Canton Guild served no purpose, other than to divide the members

into two camps, those who deplored Chang's purblind folly and those who defended his right to manage his own affairs, and were inclined to envy his luck.

His marriage attracted more than the usual amount of attention because both the parties in their respective spheres of activity had become notable figures in that amorphous semi-European type of Chinese society, which has been evolved at the Treaty ports by the pouring of new wine into old bottles. Chang loomed large in the public eye for many reasons. *Imprimis*, as compradore to the rich firm of Baghdad Jews which imported the best Patna and Benares opium for the Chinese market, he had amassed a vast fortune, which it pleased him to spend right royally. His theatrical entertainments and ambrosial nights at Chang Su-ho's gardens were the talk of the town, so that even Viceroys and Governors were his willing (and often profitable) guests. He was the owner of two native banks and half a dozen pawnshops ; twice, with the assistance of friends in high office, he had succeeded in cornering the rice market after bad harvests—a financier, in fact, of great ability. Moreover, he was distinguished above the rank and file of the compradore fraternity in that he belonged by birth to the caste of the *literati* and boasted a classical education which, had he so desired, might have enabled him to pass the examinations for public office. But his father, a man of vision, had preferred to set his feet in the path of foreign trade and to stimulate in him a taste for enterprises more lucrative than the customary squeezes of a mandarin. With his education Chang had acquired a cultured taste in art and literature, whilst his relations with Europeans had given him a perception of China's limitations

and an inclination towards travel and liberal ideas. Three years before the date at which this story begins, he had purchased the rank of Taotai, becoming thereby entitled to appear on official occasions with a blue button on his cap and an embroidered crane on his chest. Finally, he was a member of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, Director of an important shipping line and brother-in-law to the Governor of a province. A big man, in fact, and far-seeing ; yet for all his wisdom, brought to foolishness and an untimely end, as you shall see, by the five allurements of a " flower heart " singing girl.

Lee Fu-shun, the leading importer of birds-nest and *bêche de mer*, and Chang's most energetic rival for the Chairmanship of the Canton Guild, was good enough to say that only some grievous sin committed in a previous state of existence could account for Chang's folly in marrying this girl. Why couldn't he have married the sister of some powerful official and then bought the girl as an ornamental addition to his household ? That, of course, would have been the usual and proper way of doing things. But Shanghai is not as the cities of China and Mei Ling was not as the docile daughters of the Middle Kingdom. It was common knowledge that her *bijou* residence in the Kwangsi Road was adorned, so to speak, with the scalps of half the big mandarins and rich merchants of the province. Five years of unbroken triumph as the most celebrated song-bird of the Foochow Road had taught this daughter of the horse-leech to deal haughtily with wealthy wooers. My friend Ming Woo, the native detective, who in due course went thoroughly into all the facts of the case, declares than when Chang bought Mei

Ling, for forty thousand taels, from the Pavilion of Fragrant Spring Blossoms, her masterful ladyship gave him plainly to understand that, whether bond or free, she had no wish to leave her life of gilded ease for anything but a position of more ample and assured dignity ; she also intimated that you may take a filly to the water, but you cannot make it drink. Ming Woo is convinced that Chang, being in love with the girl, married her simply because it was that or nothing. As to the matter of her personal charms, there is no doubt at all ; to this day, men speak of her in the tea-houses of Soochow and Hangchow as a blossom of fragrant memory and a marvel of fascination. At night, when summoned to sing to some party of young blades or mellow mandarins at a gilded restaurant, her progress down the Foochow Road, borne high on the shoulder of her stalwart serving man, was always an event and sometimes a sensation ; for half the *viveurs* in town would get wind of it and follow her, blocking the traffic of the narrow street. Doubtless, the fierce light that beat upon her dainty person had a good deal to do with Chang's determination to win her at all costs ; and probably he hoped that, as his wife, she would settle down to comfortable domesticity. As a concubine, she would most probably have absconded, in which case he would have lost not only his money but much "face." All of which merely goes to show that Ling Mei was no gentle singing maiden of the classical type ; on the contrary, she was notorious for the boldness with which she continually defied, not only the conventions, but the proprieties, usually observed by her class. She made no concealment of her taste for foreign jewellery, champagne and the society

of young actors of ruffling reputation ; in contrast to the discreet Aspasias and Delilahs of the Foochow Road she struck a loud note of wilfulness and indecorous display. It was frequently her pleasure to drive to the Bubbling Well in a smart victoria, with the latest captive of her bow and spear, observed and discussed of all men. Because of these things, and because she was possessed of a spoiled child's determination to do just as she pleased, and a perfectly ruthless vindictiveness when thwarted in so doing, the orthodox wise-acres and greybeards of the Canton Guild were justified in shaking their heads. Any fool could see that Chang Sun-pow was looking for trouble.

Nevertheless, for three years after his marriage, all went well and the croakers had much food for thought. Mei Ling, sumptuously established in a semi-foreign house on the French side, dutifully presented her lord with two children, a son and a daughter. Come what might, Chang had justified his choice, now that the ancestral worship of his house was thus assured. There were, it is true, vague rumours of conjugal strife, but Chang, after the first fine frenzy of his infatuation, was no foolish weakling, and the lady who played Delilah to his Samson had need to go warily. On the whole, Mei Ling behaved herself circumspectly enough and brought no serious discredit on her husband's house. At the end of three years, however, Chang, either weary of domesticity, or spurred by ambition and the *wanderlust*, resigned his position of compradore and got himself appointed as a sort of supernumerary attaché to the suite of the Manchu princeling who professed to represent China at the St. Louis Exhibition.

He had not been gone a month when the voice

of scandal began to whisper, and soon to shout, the name of Mei Ling, and to proclaim the fact that she had returned to her former haunts and habits. In particular, she renewed close relations, which she was at no pains to conceal, with a certain Tientsin actor name Fu Erh-ling, a Thesbian of the oiled and curled variety. To give the fellow his due, he was a clever comedian, witty and famous in his way, ever ready with the topical patter in which Tientsin players and audiences rejoice ; and withal a very devil of a Lothario. Before Chang had landed at San Francisco, his wife's name, coupled with that of the actor, had become the subject of ribald jesting in the tea-houses and amongst the coolies of the water front. Mei Ling never did things by halves ; when she went to dine with Fu Erh-ling at Loongwha or the Well, neither he nor she attempted to hide their brilliant lights under a bushel. Then there were resounding nights of revelry at the house on the French side, to which resorted all the roystering blades and lily-footed songstresses of the Foochow Road ; and much of Chang's good money was poured into the foaming tide of their merry-making. The thing soon became a grave scandal and even a matter of concern to the authorities ; for, after all, Chang was an official, and it was an offence to mandarin dignity that a low comedian should thus disgrace his house and waste his substance in the sight of all men. On the other hand, as I have said, Mei Ling was the owner of a very interesting collection of mandarin scalps, hostages given to her by love-sick and imprudent swains in her halcyon hetaira days ; therefore, upon reflection, the authorities thought it best to adopt a policy of masterful inactivity. So it was left to

Chang's deceased wife's sister to bring the matter to his knowledge, which the good lady did, with no little satisfaction and much wealth of detail, in letters addressed to St. Louis. "Come back swiftly," she wrote, "and deal with this shameless one, or you will have no face left and the ricksha men will mock you in the streets."

Chang came back. What actually took place upon his return is not known, even to my inquisitive detective friend, Ming Woo ; the meeting between husband and wife was private and confidential. But once again the croakers were disappointed ; there was no public scandal. A few days later it was known in the tea-houses that Fu Erh-ling had left in a hurry for Tientsin, escaping just in time to avoid arrest on a City Magistrate's warrant ; and on the following Sunday, Chang and his wife, all smiles and bows, drove together as usual on the Maloo. The deceased wife's sister was filled with bitterness by this *dénouement*, but the elders of the Canton Guild were, on the whole, relieved by the actor's discreet disappearance. Their little world had been greatly disturbed by this wild hawk's descent upon dovecots which, generally speaking, were as safe as their other investments ; but they had no desire to have the scandal publicly discussed in all its piquant details.

Three months later, Chang departed for Singapore, on business connected with a new tin-mining company in the Straits ; but this time Mei Ling and her younger child went with him. They remained in Singapore a month, living together on apparently amicable terms, in a house which had been placed at their disposal by a Cantonese friend ; during this month, Chang made one or two visits to the tin-mine up country. Mei Ling spent

most of her spare time, whilst he was away, driving about the neighbourhood by herself in a hired gharry ; she dressed quietly, behaved with unusual sobriety and seemed for once to have no wish to attract attention. His business at an end, Chang fixed the day of his departure to return to Shanghai. But he never saw Shanghai again. On the morning of that day, his servant's knocking failed to wake him. It was then discovered that nothing would ever wake him any more, for his head had been severed from his body, apparently at one clean stroke, and then neatly replaced on the pillow where it had lain. In a corner of the room they found a blood-stained Japanese sword. The killing had been done deliberately and with care ; wads of Japanese paper and a quantity of white powder had been applied to the head and trunk, and there was not much blood about.

Police investigations produced no clue to the crime, nor anything to incriminate any inmate or frequenter of the house. Mei Ling's evidence, supported by that of her amah, showed that she had spent the night with the child and the servant in her own room, and they had heard nothing. She and Chang had dined together the night before at a Cantonese restaurant, and before retiring she had sat and talked to her husband while he smoked four or five pipes of opium. He had no enemies that she knew of in Singapore ; as for the Japanese sword, she had never seen it before. A verdict of wilful murder against some person unknown was recorded, and the Court gave orders that the body should be carefully embalmed before being taken back, to await the propitious day of burial, to Shanghai. The head was duly sewn on to its trunk again, for no Chinese may enter

the Celestial Paradise in a dismembered state.

Mei Ling returned, as a widow, to Shanghai. There, after a scandalously brief period of mourning, she resumed her old life, and her former relations with Fu Erh-ling, who made his reappearance on the scene shortly after her return. Once more her conduct became a public scandal and a byword ; shaven heads and eager tongues wagged faster than ever over the tea-cups at the Canton Guild. Even for those who were prepared to give the merry widow the benefit of their doubts, her outrageous behaviour during the prescribed period of mourning became an unpardonable offence. And the proprietary rights insolently assumed by Fu Erh-ling, his flagrantly riotous living on the dead man's estate, were not to be lightly borne. A family council was held and upon the advice of the deceased wife's sister, it was decided to invoke the unofficial assistance of my friend, Ming Woo, the detective.

Ming Woo, a native of Ningpo, was at that time one of the oldest members of the native detective branch of the Municipal Police, a branch frequently recruited on the principle of setting a thief to catch a thief. To say that he was a friend of mine is perhaps going a trifle too far. By a lucky accident, I had once been able to assist in frustrating a murderous attack upon his life and a conspiracy against the ends of justice, and he therefore honoured me with a deference which bordered upon friendship and with as much of his confidence as he thought good for me ; in so doing, he often told me things about the seamy side of life in the Model Settlement which were not recorded in Police reports. In the matter of crimes against the person and against property, Ming Woo was

a terror to evil-doers but, like all his colleagues, he looked with a lenient, not to say a benevolent, eye upon breaches of the regulations ordained by a paternal alien government for the maintenance of public order and decency. As the result of countenancing these evasions, he enjoyed a very substantial and regular income, cheerfully contributed *sub rosa*, by gambling dens, tea-shops, opium houses and other public resorts of doubtful character. It was in his nature, and to his interest, to make reasonable allowance for such frailties of human nature, but in dealing with pukka outlaws and criminals he was a perfect bloodhound ; keen, wily and of many devices. For the judicial procedure of the Mixed Court in such cases, for its expensive learned counsel and rules of evidence, he cherished the most profound contempt. From long experience, he knew the futility of these proceedings, just as the Chinese Magistrate knows it when, after the Consular Assessor has departed, he proceeds to extract evidence, by native methods, in the privacy of an inner chamber. Ming Woo had his own ways of obtaining the information which his knowledge of a case justified him in expecting from an unwilling witness. His favourite method was the "thirst cure," but if pressed for time he used to resort to an ingenious device, which consisted of putting slips of thin bamboo between the fingers of the witness and then applying a tourniquet of wet rope.

Ming Woo, who had known far more about Mei Ling in her singing-girl days than ever came to the ears of her husband, went to work at once upon the case, proceeding, as was his wont, along the lines of least resistance. That line he discovered in the amah, who had confirmed Mei

Ling's *alibi*, a slave girl apparently much attached to her mistress. He did not believe that either the girl or Mei Ling could have committed the murder, but he was convinced that both knew all about it and that no torture would ever extract the truth from the widow. With the help of his runners he therefore proceeded to decoy the amah into the native city—not a difficult matter, for the girl was a simple-minded creature and readily obeyed a false summons to attend her mistress at the theatre in a brougham sent for her. In a secluded upper chamber, assisted by two of his "seconds," Ming Woo conducted his private examination, terrifying the girl at the outset by telling her that Mei Ling's guilt was known and that, unless she confessed her share in the crime, death by the slicing process would be her portion. Nevertheless, it was only after an hour's application of the "heavenly bamboo" that the wretched creature, in a state of collapse, confessed the truth bit by bit. On the night of the murder, she said, Mei Ling had drugged her husband's coffee. Then, while he was heavily sleeping, Fu Erh-ling, the disguised gharry driver, had slain him with one blow. Mei Ling, she declared, was not present at the killing. It was all the actor's scheme, from beginning to end ; he was a bad man who only wanted to live in fatness on his mistress's fortune. Ming Woo tried to make the girl sign this evidence, but she flatly refused, and after having fainted three times under further ministrations of the heavenly bamboo, was finally restored with *samshu* and, so to speak, filed for reference.

There was no difficulty about getting a warrant for the arrest of Mei Ling and her lover on Ming Woo's evidence, for all the influence of the Can-

tonese and of the comrade fraternity was now brought to bear upon the matter. Before the first hearing at the Mixed Court, Chang's family petitioned the Magistrate asking that, since the amah had confessed, the case might be handed over, without further ado, to the native City authorities. The case, they declared, was not a fit one for foreign lawyers and dilatory proceedings. But Mei Ling, well aware of what would happen to her in the native city, and aware also of the jealousy with which foreigners maintained the prerogatives of the Mixed Court, promptly engaged the services of two eloquent and expensive American lawyers. All their eloquence was of no avail ; under the watchful eye of Ming Woo, the wretched amah, her features distorted with terror, repeated her grim tale. Counsel for the defence, with a shrewd inkling as to the methods by which this damning evidence had been obtained, denounced the charge and the manner of its preferment as scandalous. Mei Ling and Fu Erh-ling both boldly declared under cross-examination that the slave girl had been heavily bribed to lie by Chang's family, hungry for the reversion of his estate. But all to no purpose. It was a hot afternoon in July, the Court was uncomfortably stuffy, and the American Assessor, anxious to leave it for a game of tennis and a cool drink, cheerfully concurred in the Magistrate's decision to hand over the case for trial by the native authorities.

Things now looked black for Mei Ling and her lover, but they were not yet at the end of their tether. Justice in the native city is apt to move slowly if the accused is in possession of ready money, and Mei Ling had plenty of it. A month's dilatory proceedings brought the case to a point

at which all the influence of the compradore class was brought to bear on the officials, to avenge an intolerable loss of face. This aspect of the matter became even more acute when the theatrical profession, equally agitated, secured the services of an eminent English advocate to protest, on grounds of insufficient evidence, against the extradition of the prisoners from the Mixed Court to the native city. Thereupon, the local Press began to display a lively concern for the constitutional rights of native residents to a fair trial in open Court. Next the Consular Body became involved in long-winded arguments ; then symptoms of an almost human interest were manifested by the Legations at Peking, and finally Mei Ling's affairs threatened to become an international *cause célèbre*. Meanwhile, the native city Yamen runners, rapidly waxing fat on the liberal squeezes disbursed by Mei Ling and the Tientsin actors' fund on the one side, and by the Canton Guild on the other, saw no reason for hurrying matters. In the long run, the issue would depend upon the City Magistrate and from a financial point of view, the odds were on the Canton Guild ; but if their money lasted, the accused might hope to exist comfortably enough for several years.

It happened, however, that the Magistrate was a mandarin of an unusual type, curiously indifferent to the financial opportunities of the situation. An orthodox Confucianist, a scholar of considerable distinction and something of a philosopher, he cherished a keen sense of the dignity and responsibility of his own position and duties. He had also inherited from his ancestors—natives of Yünnan—an archaic faith in the administration of justice, in such cases as this, by signs, omens

and auguries, by "dreams and by Urim and by prophets." For the rules of evidence, as laid down by foreign scribes and lawgivers, he, like Ming Woo, had no use whatsoever. His methods of determining the merits of a suit were often as primitive as those of Solomon ; and when, as in the present instance, the evidence seemed to him suspect, it was his custom to resort to methods of divination and conjuration of a kind more suitable to his native wilds than to a Treaty Port, run on modern principles, with an up-to-date native Press. Old Yao (as he was called by his staff) despised the Press as heartily as did Lord Salisbury himself. He modelled his official attitude on that of the Empress Tzŭ Hsi and the great Viceroy Tsen, both of whom had always preferred the counsel of augurs and astrologers to that of the scribes and pundits.

So it came to pass that, having conscientious doubts as to the value of the evidence forcibly extracted from the amah, balanced by equally grave suspicions of Mei Ling and her lover, old Yao decided to adopt for their trial an expedient prescribed in an ancient book of rites, which he had once seen practised with success in a similar case by an old-time Governor of Kueichou. The machinery of justice in China includes many such grim and gruesome expedients, and the farther you go from the sea-coast, the stronger are the roots of superstition to which they cling.

Yao *lao-yeh*, as I have said, was an honest official according to his lights, and the very weight of the influence brought to bear against the accused led him to give them the benefit of his doubts. He decided therefore to refer the matter for judgment to that Higher Court in which he so firmly believed, to those unseen Powers and ministers of grace

whose verdict cannot be purchased with silver or gold. To that end he gave orders that a private ordeal of justice would be held in a private room of his Yamen. He was well aware that the foreign community, in its stolid materialism, and Young China in its foolishness, would denounce his patriarchal lights as outer darkness ; the proceedings were accordingly to be secret, a confidential matter between himself, his secretary and a couple of assistants selected for their zeal and discretion. The Press was not notified. Nevertheless, through one of the Yamen runners in Mei Ling's pay, Ming Woo got wind of the business and somehow contrived to get himself smuggled in at the last moment in the capacity of an extra assistant.

As Ming Woo described it, everything connected with the subsequent proceedings must have been dramatically impressive. In the first place, old Yao arranged that the unfortunate Chang's embalmed and coffined body should be brought to his Yamen from its resting-place at the Guild joss-house. To this unusual course the Chang family agreed, on condition that the removal be done privily and by night, for the avoidance of scandal, and that the body be brought back, uninjured, within twenty-four hours. At midnight the coffin was silently set down at one end of the room prepared for the trial. The Magistrate, in full official robes, then appeared upon the scene, accompanied by a native surgeon ; the latter, at his order, proceeded to cut the stitches with which the head had been sewn on to the trunk. Old Yao then took the head, and with ceremonious respect, conveyed it to a tub full of water which stood upon a low table in the middle of the room. Gently and reverently he placed it upon the water,

where it floated lightly, with unclosed eyes that stared blankly, like broken windows in an empty house, above the jaw set tight and close drawn by the parchment skin. A swinging oil lamp, hanging just above the tub, threw its light upon Chang's ghastly but quite recognisable features ; for the rest, the large room was unfurnished and unlighted, a grim place of moving shadows, full of an ancient acrid mustiness. Silent, like grey familiars, the secretary and attendants stood at either side of the door. At a word from the magistrate, the prisoners were led in, blindfolded, and ordered to kneel, holding each other by the hand. Old Yao then addressed them in his classical patriarchal manner, briefly reciting the chief facts of the case and confessing his difficulty in deciding it. But inasmuch as Chang had certainly been murdered, and his un placated spirit called for justice, he had now decided to adopt a method of procedure which many wise judges had practised since the Han dynasty. The murdered man would be called upon to testify on his own behalf; he had been summoned for the purpose, and was here. At this Fu Erh-ling made a little shuddering noise, and trembled visibly ; but the woman beside him remained silent and quite unmoved. They were then led, still hand in hand, to within three feet of the tub. The head, gently bobbing on the dark water, seemed to be watching their movements with a grim expectancy of satisfaction. At a signal from old Yao, their eyes were suddenly unbandaged, and together, for a brief moment of silence, they stood and gazed upon the face of Chang. Then Fu Erh-ling, shaking like a reed in the wind, all his boldness of bravado gone, covered his eyes with his left hand and turning to the Magistrate,

in a hoarse whisper asked, "Why mock us like this? What words can you get from a dead man?" But still the woman remained silent, looking upon the face of her dead husband, inscrutably calm and with a little scornful smile. Ming Woo says that, as she looked, the eyes of the floating head, as if restless and perturbed, turned from her and gazed into the farther darkness.

"It was known to the wisdom of the ancients," said old Yao, speaking from his raised seat behind the tub, "that by this present device the spirit of a murdered man may be led to testify truly, if confronted with those who slew him. If you have been wrongly accused on the evidence of a false witness, the spirit of Chang will declare it, by turning his head from you. But if you did the deed, then surely his eyes will follow you and rest upon you at the appointed time. See now, the surgeon will take the head reverently between his hands and cause it to spin. Twice will this be done; mark well which way the eyes are turned when the head shall cease to move and come to rest upon the water."

I gathered from Ming Woo's vivid description of the scene, that he himself was deeply impressed and fully persuaded of the ghostly presence of Chang. All present certainly regarded the head and its impending decision of the case with reverential awe. Ming Woo, indeed, seems to have been so profoundly interested in its movements, that he paid but scant attention to Mei Ling and her lover. At all events, his account of the dramatic *dénouement* of the trial was disappointing, in so far as they were concerned, and even a little confused. It seems that, all the time that the head was spinning, old Yao kept on reciting something in a low, monotonous, droning voice, something

that sounded like an incantation—a Taoist prayer no doubt, or some ancient necromantic spell. After the first spin, the head came to rest directly facing Fu Erh-ling, and, according to Ming Woo, its eyes were no longer lustreless and vacant, but glittering with a cold unearthly light ; and they looked straight into the actor's face with a gleam of deadly malignance. Imagination, of course, or some illusion, produced by the swinging lamp-light. Mei Ling, at all events, showed no signs of fear, keeping her eyes fixed on the head, and her painted lips still curled in a faint, contemptuous smile. Then, quite suddenly, came the end. For while the head was spinning for the second time, even before its movements had ceased, Fu Erh-ling threw himself face downwards on the floor, a limp and shuddering thing, and screamed aloud. "Take it away," he shouted, "take it away ! There is a devil in his eyes. What the amah told you was true. Do with me what you will."

So the wretched pair were sent to the provincial capital to await final sentence. Fu Erh-ling managed to cheat the executioner by swallowing opium, but Mei Ling, game to the last, was strangled in due course, as the law prescribes, for complicity in her lover's crime. They say that she went to her doom as calmly as she had gone to her wedding.

At the Canton Guild, grey beards wagged solemnly for several days over their melon-seeds and lichees, praising the old-time wisdom and virtue of Yao *lao-yeh* and discoursing on the folly of marrying singing girls. Nevertheless, as Ming Woo sagely observes, 'tis a folly of which neither merchants nor mandarins will ever be cured, so long as God makes women with lips like ripe pomegranates and eyes that dance like dragon-flies in the sun.

## The Mighty Dead

ONE evening in the winter of 1900 I dined with M'Kay, a leading light of the Shanghai Bar, whose ancestral Scotch dourness had been softened to a shrewd sort of geniality by long contact with the kindly philosophy of the Chinese. Like most of the Scotchmen who have heard the East a-calling, M'Kay had prospered and waxed fat in this world's goods, and he requited the benefits of Providence by lavish hospitality of a kind that must have made his frugal forefathers turn in their mouldy graves. All Shanghai, and every globetrotter doing the appointed round of the Treaty Ports, had tales to tell of the Sunday tiffins at his sumptuous villa in the Bubbling Well Road, of the poker parties at his racing stable snuggery, and his convivial houseboat excursions. Being a bachelor, he could afford to be catholic in the matter of his company, and happily aloof from the shrill clamour of social cliques ; so long as they were companionable, cheerful, and in some way interesting, all sorts and conditions of men were welcome at his table. As to his personal hobbies and foibles, he was a perfectly serious Freemason, an authority on setters and pointers, and an indefatigable collector of antique snuff bottles.

On the evening of which I write there were a dozen of us, including Sir Michael O'Hara of the Supreme Court ; Bulton, Deputy Commissioner of

Customs ; two officers of a Sikh regiment just back from the North ; a couple of globe-trotters ; a *Times* correspondent ; Wilson of the Consular Service ; and several cheery souls collected at the Club Bar, mostly Englishmen. In fact, the only foreigner present was Bergheim, a Swiss, who combined the agency of one of the big German armament concerns with a private and highly lucrative business in old porcelain, paintings, and *objets de vertu*. As the result of the events of which this story tells, Bergheim left the East shortly afterwards and took up his abode in Paris, where until his death last year he enjoyed the distinction of being a recognised authority on Oriental art.

After the inevitable small-talk about ponies and "pidgin," the conversation turned, as it usually did in those days, to the Boxer campaign, the occupation of Peking by the Allies, and the fascinating topic of loot. Nearly every one had some story to tell, either as an eye-witness or on the authority of friends up north, of the profitable sorties and rich booty of treasure-trove, whereby the civilian communities of Tientsin and Peking had compensated themselves for hardships endured at the hands of the Boxers, while the armies of eight nations had plundered systematically in accordance with their respective regulations. From the military point of view, freely expressed by our two Sikh officers, the results of the sacking had been, on the whole, disappointing ; this, however, was hardly surprising, in view of the fact that the Boxers had got in first and made a clean sweep of all the richest jewellers, furriers, and curio-shops, and that, when it came to the looting of private premises, the local knowledge of civilian residents was far more useful than the best military intelligence,

always excepting that of the Japanese, who seemed to know exactly where to look for the richest booty, and despised the day of small things. But in spite of disappointments and opportunities missed, there had been windfalls and lucky strikes : *caches* of sycee recovered from the wells and gardens of Manchu palaces ; ancient bronzes and cloisonnés from the Temple of Heaven and other camping-grounds ; jades, crystals, and ivories, unearthed in the deserted courtyards of curio-shops. Most of the Legations' gallant rescuers had come away with bank balances comfortably increased by their share of loot auctions, and an odd case or two filled with embroideries and curios. You will find them to-day, these embroideries and curios, striking a sharply incongruous note in thousands of stolid English drawing-rooms, where fond wives and proud mothers invariably relate how they came straight "from the Palace."

It was from Wilson of the Consular Service, who had been through the siege, and Mullins, a very wideawake young man, just returned from a successful expedition to Peking in connection with the French contingents' haul of tribute silk, that we got the best yarns and the most vivid impression of the lust for loot which seized upon the European community at Peking after the relief of the Legations, and set them to plundering wholesale the sheep-like citizens of the capital, even as the Israelites plundered the Egyptians to celebrate the triumphant close of their captivity. Were it not for the absurd law which decrees that "the greater the truth the greater the libel," what a book might be made out of the yarns that were spun around M'Kay's table that night, of flashing fortunes, swift dooms, and crowded hours of glorious loot !

Only the pen of a Stevenson or a Conrad, however, could do justice to these tales—to the tragic splendour of the background of Oriental stoicism and invincible dignity, against which all their sordid episodes stand out in such clear relief.

One yarn I remember, told by *Times* correspondent, described the adventures and experiences of an artillery officer on the memorable day of the triumphal procession of the Allies through the Palace precincts, and gave us the story of the famous rock of jade, engraved with poems by the Emperor Chien Lung, which now reposes in the Metropolitan Museum at New York. Then there was the Odyssey of the distinguished diplomat who set forth at daylight, with a train of mule-carts and an escort, for a good day's work in the Manchu district by the Drum Tower, and of what thereafter befell ; also the tale of the missionary militant, whose righteous wrath against the heathen, combined with much local knowledge of native art connoisseurs, enabled Fellows of the American Legation to acquire his priceless collection. Some humorous tales there were, like that which told how "Aurora" Bailey persuaded His Excellency Tang Shao-yi to procure railway engines at Tientsin ; and that of the enterprising person who, on the strength of a borrowed R.E. mess-jacket and a roving commission from a Shanghai editor, made his way to the front with Seymour's force and reaped a goodly harvest by buying sycee "shoes" (which Tommy could not conveniently handle) with dollar notes. Another equally ingenious individual, a German merchant, had made his pile by decorating the houses of his Chinese friends with German flags, for liberal value received. There were grim stories too, that had grown and spread from the guarded

confidences of compradores and native Christians, such as that of the old mandarin who had entrusted his pearls and other valuables to the safe keeping of a foreigner when the Boxers first began to loot, and whose body was found in the well of his ransacked house after the relief ; and there was the horrid tale of the fate of Doctor Matignon's eunuch, who hanged himself because of "face" lost beyond all hope of recovery.

From the military point of view, of course, war is a necessary evil, and looting all part of the business ; but most of us, I believe, agreed with M'Kay when, over a final whisky-and-soda, he said that it wouldn't be easy to look one's Chinese friends in the face and talk to them about the blessings and beauty of European civilisation after this latest demonstration of its practical application. In our hearts, I think we all felt that no matter what the Boxers in their blindness, or the Old Buddha in her pride, might have done, the white man had little reason to be proud, either of his conception of just retribution or his methods of administering it. I know that as I listened to these tales, and remembered the fiendish cruelty of the Russian troops and the cold-blooded frightfulness of the German's mailed fist, I pictured to myself the silent sufferings of the inoffensive law-abiding citizens of Peking, and all the dark days of terror and tribulation endured by these simple-souled pacifists, and I found it in my heart to condone the "midsummer madness" of the "Old Buddha," and to sympathise with her forlorn hope that by help of the Boxers she might at last drive the foreign devil and all his works into the sea.

To Bergheim, as we drove homewards together, I delivered myself of some of these feelings. He

and I had sat next to each other at dinner, and I had noticed that he had taken but little part in the general conversation, which for him was unusual. A pleasant fellow, Bergheim, thoroughly cosmopolitan and at the same time something of a philosopher and a scholar, not exactly the type one would expect to make a success of selling gunboats and artillery to the Chinese. Nevertheless he had done it, and had succeeded also in establishing friendly relations with most of the mandarins with whom his business lay. He spoke the language like a native, and his scholarly taste in everything that pertained to Chinese art and antiquities had opened to him the doors of many a mandarin who played no part in the munitions business. After the relief of the Legations, he had spent a month at Peking, and many were the rumours of the rare bargains which his ready money and expert knowledge had enabled him to secure. Amongst M'Kay's guests there was none so well qualified as he to tell us things worth hearing of the looting at Peking. But he had remained curiously preoccupied and silent all the evening. Now, as I expressed my sympathy for the innocent victims of Asia's latest clash with the West, he seemed to pull himself together with an effort before he answered ; and then it seemed to me that though he spoke with his usual dry and whimsical humour, the humour was forced and his thoughts were really elsewhere.

"Yes," he said, "you are right. We apostles of light and leading can only hope to spread our gospel by the help of machine-guns. The White Peril is far more deadly than the Yellow, and I don't blame the Chinese for wishing that every one of us —merchants, missionaries, and machine-gunners— might get out and leave them to run their own

affairs. But, of course, it's all foolishness ; you can't put the clock back, East or West."

"Just as well, perhaps. If Prince Tuan and his friends had known enough to use those field-guns of yours, instead of leaving them to rust in their cases at Hsiku, you and I might not be driving comfortably down to Maloo to-night with a good dinner inside us."

"My friend, you flatter me ! But I suppose you have often wondered how a person like myself ever came into the business of selling fire-arms ?"

"Well, since you speak of it," I replied, "I confess that, for one whose philosophy is of the benevolent type——"

"Just so ; but has it never struck you that it is only in China that a man can combine humanitarian instincts with the arms trade ? Have you never heard of the wooden guns of the A.B.C. flotilla ? There is no other country in the world where high officials will pay the market price (after deducting their "squeeze," of course) for sand-loaded shells. I don't suppose it has ever occurred to you that my intelligent appreciation of the Chinese philosophic attitude towards warfare has saved more lives than all the efforts of the missionaries put together ?"

I admitted that I had never thought of it in that light, nor realised the range of his ingenious philanthropy.

"Yes," he went on, "the Allies ought to put up a statue of me on the Chien Men wall, and the Chinese another one outside the East Gate Glorious. For if the British Legation had been blown to bits, there wouldn't have been much left of the Palace or its contents to welcome the Old Buddha when she comes back. But it's an ungrateful world." He relapsed into thoughtful silence, and after one or

two desultory remarks I followed his example. There was evidently something on his mind.

Suddenly, as the brougham stopped to set me down at my front door, he laid his hand on my arm and said, "Will you come and take pot-luck with me to-morrow evening? There won't be anyone else. I want your advice about something that is worrying me—something that, I think, will interest you."

I accepted at once. To dine with Bergheim meant not only an addition to one's understanding of things Chinese, but a new conception of the science and art of gastronomy.

As I crossed his threshold on the following evening and was handing my coat to the boy, I got my first shock, and with it an instinctive feeling of momentous events moving mysteriously in the background. For in this boy, calmly wearing Bergheim's house-livery of blue silk, silver girdle, and fur-trimmed official hat, I recognised one Peng Shao-chi, a Chinese bannerman of the metropolis, and one of the cleverest and keenest of the younger officials attached to the Viceregal Yamen at Tientsin.

Two years before (to be exact, just after the Old Buddha's *coup d'état* had deprived the young Emperor of power and scattered his advisers to the winds) I had had some interesting private talks with Mr. Peng, who had come to Shanghai in pursuit of the Chief Reformer, Kang Yu-wei. Of his identity there could be no possible doubt. Yet there was neither the flicker of an eyelid nor the ghost of a smile to indicate any recognition on his part. Evidently some mischief was afoot; in that case, I thought, it looked as if I held the trump-card, and might as well play it at once.

"Hallo, Mr. Peng," I said, "since when have you taken to 'boy pidgin'? I thought you had gone to Peking with Li *tajen*?"

As I spoke a door closed upstairs, and Bergheim's footsteps sounded on the landing above. For a second Peng remained silent, his features immovable as those of a graven image. But his hands were moving restlessly, and the shadow of fear lay in his almond eyes. Then, as the footsteps came nearer, he bent swiftly towards me and whispered in Chinese, "You and I have been friends. Do not, I beg you, betray me. To-morrow morning I will come and explain all. This disguise was necessary. I am here to serve the Imperial House."

"Swear then that you mean no harm to Mr. Bergheim."

"I swear it. His life is in no danger from me. On the contrary, I am here to deliver him from a great peril."

"Then come to-morrow morning early. Meanwhile I make no promises. Remember that I am a guest in the house of a friend."

Furiously thinking, I left him, and proceeded to greet my host. He, I could see, was still worried about something, and not at all his usual genial self.

Soft-footed, dignified, as if to the butler's business born, Peng brought us cocktails on a silver tray. As he left us, to throw open the sliding doors which divided the study from the dining-room, Bergheim apologised in advance for any shortcomings in his dinner, on the ground that his own house-boy had been suddenly summoned home to attend his dying mother.

"Fortunately," he said, "he has found me a very decent substitute. This fellow seems to know his job."

As we took our seats at table I got my second surprise. For there, conspicuous in the midst of silver, cut glass, and flaming poinsettia, stood an ancestral tablet, and it only needed a glance at the five-clawed dragons and the inscription in Chinese and Manchu characters to tell me that this simple strip of carved and lacquered wood was nothing less than the earthly habitation of the Spirit of Shun Chih, illustrious founder of the Manchu dynasty. From it my gaze passed to the calm features of Peng, standing rigid as a statue behind Bergheim's chair. In a flash I realised the cause and the significance of his presence in this house. I think that the total absence of expression on Peng's face conveyed to my bewildered mind a swifter suggestion of the grim possibilities of the situation than the sight of the Imperial tablet itself. For I guessed something of the thoughts that must be swiftly working behind that impenetrable mask of passivity, something of the self-control which enabled him thus patiently to stand and wait in the very presence of the ghostly splendour of the mighty dead. According to the ancient and deep-rooted belief, which makes ancestor-worship the dominant factor in the life of the Chinese, the spirit of the departed Emperor, translated after the closing of his tomb to this strip of lacquered wood, was actually and terribly present in our midst, and entitled to Imperial honours even greater than those given to the living sovereign. That the august shade should have been brought to this, that it should have been thus led into captivity and become the plaything of outer barbarians, this surely was sacrilege which the wrath of Heaven must speedily avenge. As I sipped my sherry, my thoughts were swiftly working, and

I had almost resolved to make a sudden rush at Peng, and hold on to him until I had explained his identity to Bergheim and the nature of his mission on behalf of the Imperial House. Then it occurred to me that Peng's removal would not help to solve the problem, and, moreover, he had given his word that Bergheim's life was not in danger. I therefore determined on a policy of watchful waiting.

Bergheim, who had said nothing while I examined the tablet, finally broke the silence which was becoming curiously oppressive.

"Yes," he said ; "that is what I wanted to talk to you about. I see that you know what it is. I don't quite know what to do about it."

"Well, if you ask me," I replied, "it's not the sort of thing I should care to have about the house. I'm not superstitious, as you know, and I haven't got much of a bump of reverence for the pomp and circumstance of religion ; but this is a different matter. If you take my advice, you will acquire merit and avoid trouble by sending that old Manchu's spiritual home to the Taotai and asking him to have it restored with all solemnity to its place in the Temple of Dynastic Ancestors."

"As a matter of fact, that's just what the Taotai has asked me to do. He called to see me this afternoon. I'll tell you all about it later on."

Here, with a wink and the rapid movement of a warning thumb, he indicated Peng.

For the rest of the meal we talked of anything and everything except the ghosts of emperors. Nevertheless, the Presence emanating from that tablet lay heavily upon us, and we could not keep our minds off it. As far as I am concerned, I have seldom spent a more uncomfortable hour. Our

talk was like trying to whistle in a cathedral, and I never felt more relieved in my life when Bergheim ordered coffee to be served in the study, and we left the Imperial tablet to radiate by itself between the walnuts and the wine.

Bergheim's explanation left me just as uncomfortable as ever, and greatly surprised that one who knew as much about the Chinese as he did should dream of detaining his deceased majesty, especially now that the authorities had located him. Bergheim had bought the tablet, with a lot of other temple loot, from a Mohammedan dealer ; he had paid no particular attention to it at the time, and had shipped the lot south at once. It was about a fortnight later that, dining at the French Legation, he had heard that on the day of the Allies' march of triumph, two German soldiers, manœuvring on their own, had found their way into the Temple of Dynastic Ancestors. There they had helped themselves to four out of the nine Imperial tablets, as well as some of those representing the thirty-five Imperial Consorts. They had sold them all, with other unconsidered trifles, to a disreputable Mohammedan, who did a roaring trade as middleman between the free-lance military looters and the eager collectors of the Legation Quarter. He in his turn had speedily disposed of the sacred tablets to half a dozen different buyers. One had come to rest in the American Legation, another in the French, and two had passed into the acquisitive hands of M'Taggart of the Carabineers. But even in those lawless days of plunder in high places, the report of their disappearance created something of a sensation amongst the diplomats and missionaries who knew enough to realise the enormity of the sacrilege which had been committed. Steps

were therefore taken without delay to recover and restore the missing monarchs to their rightful place. As their purchasers were still in Peking, and as each tablet became a centre from which swift whisperings and forebodings of doom spread to an ever-widening circle of awe-stricken Chinese, they were soon traced, and eventually restored, with the sole exception of the one which, all unwittingly, Bergheim had shipped to Shanghai. Even this one was located, for the offending dealer had been speedily terrified into disclosing the identity of his customers. So it came to pass that, on the night before Bergheim left the capital, the Mohammedan had come to him and implored him, as a matter of life and death, to restore the tablet. But Bergheim had refused to promise anything of the sort. All his keen collector's instincts were gratified at having become the possessor of an object so venerably unique, of something to which no museum could aspire.

And so (as I heard later) it happened that on the steamer which carried Bergheim from Tientsin, there travelled also, inconspicuously, the worthy Peng Shao-chi, commissioned by the Board of Rites to recover the tablet at all costs. Before their arrival at Shanghai Bergheim's consignment of Pekinese loot had already been safely delivered at his house. Therefore, before resorting to drastic measures, Peng had called on the Taotai, informed him of his mission, and asked his advice. The Taotai, hoping that Bergheim would yield to official representations, advised prudence and undertook to see him. This he did, but the arguments which he used were not calculated to convince Bergheim. An appeal to his magnanimity, or to his reverence for the immemorial traditions of which

an Imperial tablet is the most sacred emblem, might possibly have been successful ; but the Taotai was a tactless person. He began by describing himself as the representative of the Chinese Government, and spoke in unmeasured terms of the outrageous conduct of those who had desecrated the Temple of Ancestors. He expressed the hope that a person of Bergheim's well-known culture would dissociate himself from such vandalism by restoring the tablet and any other sacred objects which he might have acquired. Next he suggested that if restitution was to be discussed as a matter of business, he was prepared to pay a thousand taels. This put Bergheim's back up ; and it got stiffer as the initial courtesy of the Taotai's attitude diminished. He suggested to the Chinese official that as there was no longer any Government at Peking, nor any Court to mourn for the disturbance of its ancestors, there need be no hurry : he would give the matter his deliberate consideration.

Finally, the Taotai, unable to accept failure in a business from which he had hoped to emerge with much "face," committed the final mistake of indulging in veiled but none the less unpleasant threats ; upon which Bergheim bluntly intimated that the interview was at an end. That same evening his house-boy, explaining that "mother wantchee makee die," obtained leave of absence, and Peng entered upon his double duties.

After Bergheim had told me all this, we sat discussing the matter till past midnight ; but my host was in a peculiarly obstinate mood, and would not let me persuade him that the occasion was one for a *beau geste* of restitution. The Taotai's threats were rankling ; it went against the grain to yield to anything in the nature of intimidation.

Before I left the house he had gone carefully round seeing to bolts and bars, loaded a revolver, and locked the sacred tablet away in a small safe in his bedroom. Several times it was on the tip of my tongue to tell him about Peng, but still I refrained, remembering that sleek person's solemn assurance that Bergheim himself was in no danger. And so, not without misgivings, I took my departure, fully expecting that when I met him next, I should hear that his safe had been burgled and the tablet stolen ; also that his house-boy's mother had made a marvellous recovery.

Next morning, as I was dressing and wondering at what time Peng would make his promised call, my boy came to announce that he was downstairs, and that he had asked me to see him quickly, as his business was urgent. So, donning a kimono, I went down and found him standing in the hall.

" You see that I have kept my promise," he said, dispensing with the usual ceremonious preliminaries. " I have come because I said I would, but there is nothing now for me to tell. My mission is fulfilled."

" You mean ? "

" That the Sacred Presence of the Illustrious Founder of the Ching Dynasty will be safely restored to its place in the Temple of August Ancestors. I go now to make all the necessary arrangements so that its journey to the north may be expedited with fitting ceremony. I therefore bid you farewell, and take this occasion to thank you for your timely silence."

" What about Mr. Bergheim ? "

" He also owes you grateful thanks. Had it not been for my promise to you, it might have gone ill with him last night. He is an obstinate man, and strangely lacking in perception."

"Then he is all right?" I asked.

He seemed to hesitate for a moment before replying.

"Yes," he said, "Mr. Bergheim is all right; but if he is wise he will take my advice and never again let his face be seen in Peking. The climate of the north would be very unhealthy for him."

And with that, apologising for his haste, Peng went his soft-footed way.

My feelings were divided between relief at this bloodless conclusion of the matter and curiosity as to the means by which Peng had achieved his purpose. Prompted by the latter, I rang up Bergheim's house. The call was answered by a servant, who said that his master was not yet up, and that he had sent for a doctor shortly after daylight. This hardly sounded as if he were all right, and yet when Peng assured me that he had kept his promise, he had given me the impression of being completely sincere. Anxious to hear the end of the story, I told the servant to ask his master if I might come and see him. In a little while came the answer, "Master say 'can do'; more better come chop-chop."

Bergheim was having his breakfast in bed when I got there, propped up with a pile of cushions. He looked somewhat pale and perturbed, but I was relieved to discover no signs of assault and battery.

"Shut the door," he said, as I came in. "I am glad you rang up, for I wanted to speak to you as soon as possible. I want you to promise that you will never say anything to anyone of what I told you last night. As long as I live, my friend, I ask you to keep it to yourself."

He spoke so earnestly that I hastened to reassure him by promising him what he asked.

"Thank you," he said. "I know that I can rely upon you. It may seem silly, old fellow, but I don't want this thing talked about. I've made a fool of myself and I've paid for it ; but I would rather not be the subject of Club gossip from Tientsin to Canton."

"All right, my friend," I said. "Make your mind easy on that score. But tell me, what has happened ? "

For a minute or two he remained cogitating, evidently embarrassed and undecided about answering my question. At last he made up his mind to speak.

"You were quite right," he said, "about that infernal tablet, and I only wish that I had asked your advice sooner and followed it. But I didn't like being bullied into giving it up, and I confess I didn't see how they could hope to get it without my consent. I was wrong ; that's all. They've got it."

"Did they burgle the safe ? " I asked. "And what made you send for the doctor ? Has anyone been hurt ? "

Bergheim looked extremely uncomfortable.

"I'm coming to that in a minute or two," he said. "You remember about my house-boy leaving suddenly ? "

I nodded.

"Well, that precious substitute of his must have been a hireling of the Taotai, told off by him to do the job which he had failed to do himself."

"No," I said, "he wasn't. He came from Peking direct. I know the fellow quite well, and recognised him at once."

"You knew him, and didn't warn me ? "

"Yes," I replied ; "it sounds queer, no doubt,

but let me explain. I think you will agree that I acted for the best."

So I told him all that had passed between Peng and myself. I said frankly that, once I was assured that his own life was in no danger, I hoped that Peng would succeed in getting away with the tablet, for I felt certain that if Bergheim insisted on keeping it, he would do so at his own grave peril. I asked him to reflect that, had I denounced Peng on the spot, the consequences might have been very serious for both of us, for we were unarmed and Peng probably had accomplices on the premises. These arguments carried weight.

" You are right again, my friend," he replied. " He had accomplices. You shall hear for yourself, and then you will know why I ask you to keep this business to yourself.

" After you had left me I went to bed, taking the precaution of locking my door and putting the revolver under my pillow. I think that devil must have put something into my last whisky, for I felt uncommonly drowsy, and must have fallen into a deep sleep at once. An hour later I was awakened by a hand on my shoulder, and looked up, to see Peng standing by my bedside, wearing a fur-lined hat and dressed as if for a journey. Still only half-awake, I thought at first that the house might be on fire, or something of that sort ; then suddenly, as my mind took in the fixed sternness of his expression, it flashed upon me that his presence was in some way connected with that wretched bit of lacquered wood.

" ' Who the devil are you ? ' I asked ; ' and what do you mean by waking me at this time of night ? '

" ' I am a humble servant of the Ta Ching dynasty,' he replied, ' and my business is to recover the

sacred tablet which you bought from a Mohammedan thief in Peking. If you had left it downstairs, I should not have been compelled to inconvenience you thus. But since you have hidden it, I must ask you to produce it. My orders are to pay you the amount which you paid for it, and if you are wisely reasonable, to offer you no violence. But I warn you that my mission is urgent.'

"By this time I had pulled myself together and realised that the fellow meant mischief. For all that, the idea of being bullied out of my property in my own bedroom was not at all to my liking. As he spoke, I felt cautiously underneath the pillow for my revolver.

"' You need not trouble to do that,' he said in level tones. 'Your weapon is here'—he held it pointed carelessly in the direction of my head,—" but, as I said, my orders are to refrain from taking your life except in the last extremity. Now, as time presses, I trust that without further delay you will accede to my request. Kindly produce the Sacred Tablet, name the price, and let me take my leave.'

"For all his polite talk, there was something so infernally insolent in his manner that I lost my temper.

"' Shoot, and be damned to you,' I said. 'As for your old tablet, you are not likely to find it, and if you think that I'm going to help you, you are very greatly mistaken. Go ahead and hunt for it.'

"All this time I was keeping a watchful eye on the enemy, hoping to catch him off his guard, and by a swift movement to come to grips with him and recover the revolver. So, when with his left hand he took out his watch and looked at it, I made a sudden leap from the bed and rushed at him. As

quick as a cat, he was at the farther side of the round table over there, and had uttered a swift sharp cry in Chinese. Immediately the door opened, and there entered two tall hefty natives—Tientsin men by the look of them—who closed the door softly, and without a word came and stood one on each side of me.

“‘Now,’ said Peng, as insolently courteous as ever, ‘you will no doubt perceive the wisdom of complying with my request. I might have shot you just now, but that would not have served my purpose, which is to recover the Sacred Tablet. Time presses ; I have neither the leisure nor the desire to search your house. Do what I ask, and I shall trouble you no longer with my presence. But if you refuse, I have other and somewhat unpleasant arguments in reserve. The time for discussion is very short.’

“I confess that I didn’t like the look of things, but there’s a devil of obstinacy somewhere in my nature, and I couldn’t bear being ordered about by a sleek-faced, baby-fisted Oriental. Besides, I thought he might be bluffing. Anyway, telling him to go to the devil, I got back into bed again. After giving a sign to one of his henchmen (who thereupon left the room) Peng drew nearer.

“‘Where is the Precious Thing ?’ he asked.

“‘My friend,’ I replied, ‘I’m afraid you’ll have to search for it. I’m not in the habit of helping burglars.’

“‘Very well,’ he said. ‘Remember that it is your own fault.’

“As he spoke, the fellow who had gone out returned with a box-like object, which he placed upon the table. Then, at a nod from Peng, the

pair of them produced rolls of cord and in a moment had me neatly tied up and absolutely helpless. As I lay there, speechless with rage, Peng went to the object on the table and examined its contents. Then he returned to the bedside.

"'Pei Lao Yeh,' he said in Chinese, 'be reasonable. Do not compel me to make you lose face. Where have you concealed the tablet?'

"I shut my teeth tight and said nothing. Peng sighed in a delicately refined manner and turned to his myrmidon.

"'Apply the first seal,' he said.

"At this one of the ruffians fetched the mysterious box—(I saw then that it was a charcoal incense burner with a curious handle),—and the other unceremoniously turned me over and held me with my face amongst the pillows. The next thing I knew—it came very quickly—was a feeling as if a thousand centipedes had bitten me on the left shoulder-blade, just below the collar-bone. I'm afraid I gave a yell. Then I found myself rolled over on my back, to find Peng's placidly inquiring gaze upon me. In his hand he held something oblong that looked like an ivory-handled seal, engraved with two hieroglyphics on a copper ground.

"'This,' he said, showing it to me more closely and letting me feel the glowing heat, 'is the seal used by order of the Board of Rites to brand those who have been guilty of sacrilege. You now bear that mark upon you for life. It will not be visible when you are dressed, and in foreign lands will expose you to no inconvenience or danger. Peking is a different matter ; thither henceforward you can only go at your peril. And now, let me warn you once again. If the first seal should not be sufficient,

the second will be made on the right wrist. The third goes on the forehead.'

"I knew by this time that the devil meant what he said, and having no desire to go through life branded like a calf, I surrendered. Peng took the key which I gave him, opened my safe, and after prostrating himself nine times and knocking his head on the floor, took out the Sacred Tablet and wrapped it reverently in a covering of Imperial yellow brocade. Then he and his satellites moved silently to the door. As he went out he turned and made me an ironically courteous farewell. 'I do not think,' he said, 'that you will attempt to recover the tablet, or to bring a complaint through diplomatic channels at Peking. On both sides a dignified silence will no doubt be the wisest policy. But to prevent any chance of interference with my plans for the next half-hour, I have disconnected your telephone, and shall now take the liberty of locking this door.' And with that he took his departure, leaving me to reflect at leisure on the power of the mighty dead in China, and the painful sensations of branding on a sensitive skin. The doctor has dressed it with some soothing stuff, but I shan't be able to wear a coat for some days."

"Won't the doctor talk?" I asked.

"I don't think so. He's a model of discretion. As a matter of fact, I've asked him to let it be known that I have got to go home and consult specialists for some mysterious ailment, which, between you and me, will hereafter compel me to remain in Europe. I've had all the China I want, thank you."

I have frequently heard Shanghai folks guessing at the reasons which led Bergheim to retire so suddenly from his lucrative business and take up his

abode in Paris ; others have wondered that he, who had always been keen on swimming, could never be induced to bathe. And in Peking I have heard the Chinese tell fantastic tales of the perilous adventures and fortunate restoration of the Imperial Ancestors in 1900. But the true story of His Majesty Shun Chih's brief visit to Shanghai and of his presence at that memorable *diner intime chez Bergheim*, has never before been told, except perhaps by the illustrious founder of the dynasty himself to his astonished descendants, as they stand, each in his accustomed place, in the twilight silence of the Temple of Dynastic Ancestors.

## The Black Cart

"*H O-SHANG*, lover of all things that have life, love me too," said O'Hara to my friend, Chien Shan, incumbent of Pearl Grotto, which is the highest of all the shrines at the western hills. "I will lay all my winnings on the altar if you bring him to me, alive or dead ; for the grasshopper is a burden and his infernal noise is eating into my soul."

Chien Shan said nothing (he is not talkative when the pangs of a losing game are on him) but he stopped in the middle of a new diagram and fetched a long thin pole from behind the Goddess of Mercy. Then he called to little Wang Erh, who was training his crickets by the gate, to bring him the bird-lime—it was in the foreign jam-tin over the stove-bed. Jim and I watched his operations with one eye, keeping the other on the beam, whence a sinful cicada was pouring out a torrent of abuse. He had been at it for hours, without turning a hair, defying a rival in the eaves of the coolie's quarters, and his voice was rapidly getting on our nerves. After every discharge, he would roll his beady eyes at us and chortle softly to himself of love and war ; but he chortled no more when Chien Shan made a wily flank movement, touched his wings with the end of the stick and knocked him off into the lotus tub. O'Hara fished him out and examined his anatomy.

"There's a power of noise to the square inch of this insect now, isn't there? Reminds me of old Rourke at Trinity;—you remember, Phil, the way that little man could use his tongue? And I should say we got just as much sense out of him as out of this specimen. Still, little Rourke made a living by it, so he's forgiven;—but as for this devil, there's no more excuse for his singing than there is for the people who get up and howl at us when we're trying to digest."

"It occurs to me that some bug-man has shown it to be their method of making love," I remarked for the defence, "and the females are said to enjoy it immensely. If it is a case of eccentric behaviour under influence of the tender passion, it would be unseemly in you, Jim, to pass judgment."

At this juncture, Wang Erh, acolyte and messenger-in-ordinary, came up to us, with a fierce longing for the cicada in his eye. He could get three cash for it from the barber by the ford, whose brother sells them at the bird-shop just outside the "Chang I" gate—it would be better than killing it.

"Take him, imp, and begone!" said O'Hara, "but if ever I hear the voice of a grinder in your quarters, there will be no preliminary trial. Be off with him to the ford now, and ask on the way back whether there are any letters for me at the Legation temple." Wang Erh disappeared with a briskness that the Northerner displays only in his own interests.

"Let's get out on to the terrace," I suggested. "We have all had enough of this game for one day and thank goodness, the sun is dropping behind the hill. Buddha means to be hospitable, but his quarters are stuffy and the flavour of these joss-

sticks anything but sweet. We will sit on the wall and smoke. There is a bit of a breeze and it is jolly to look at the city and think of our dear colleagues sweltering in the heat and dust—a pleasure, by the way, which I shall not enjoy very long."

"Come on, *Ho-shang*," called O'Hara to the priest. The old man had shuffled off to replace the bird-lime and was now sitting pensively on the door-step. "Come on ! don't play to-morrow's games before to-day has left us. See ! I lay on the altar all my winnings, with a dollar as thank-offering at Amida's feet. Have we not thrown for two hours and have I not won from the old fox who never was beaten before ? Surely my glory is enough for me. Bring out your long pipe and sit with us on the wall and tell us of the days when you were young, before barbarians had disturbed the peace of the Middle Kingdom."

So Chien Shan came and sat with us on the wall that fronts the Pearl Grotto, the wall that looks down on the terraced shrines of Ssu Ping T'ai and far over the plain, where Peking lay choking in summer dust and evil odours. There we sat, two amateur idlers and one professional, forgetting in the cool of the evening the heat that had been at noon. Below us, Wang Erh, the acolyte, was swinging along, with his queue twisted round his head, and the expostulations of the cicada were growing fainter and fainter. Far below, in the courtyard of the big temple where the missionaries pass the summer, we could see through the chestnut and pine trees the ardours of a tennis party, and the breeze brought us fragments of the "Mikado," after the manner of Vernon, the new Legation student. It was towards the end of July, and in

every temple of the Western Hills little groups of the foreign community were resting from their labours, in places sacred to the dreamy cult of Buddha, with mutual gain and much friendliness. Across the broad plain, round which the Peiho flows, and beyond the old pagoda, the west gate of the city stood out amidst a murky haze against a misty green background : a distant but distinct reminder of the City of Dreadful Dust in the dog days, and, in our present mood, suggestive of its mysterious depths, of that grim underworld of which we had caught glimpses on the surface—as one may see the weeds on a pond whose depths are hidden. Chien Shan, too, could see the city walls ; to him they brought recollections of days that are for ever gone, of things that we can never know, even though we live among them and try our best to learn.

O'Hara sighed contentedly as he offered the priest a Manila. Then he turned to me. "How long did you say you were out for ?"

"Ten days," I replied, "and precious hard to get them, even with the medico to lie for me. That's the beauty of working for these natives ; the hotter it gets, the livelier they become ;—*ergo*, the livelier they make it for us."

"Well, old man, I'm sorry for you. I haven't been near the city for two months, but I can imagine it. Don't forget there's always room for you here at week-ends ; it may possibly give you an object in life—though why you ever took service with the heathen is a mystery to me."

"Dollars," I said, "simply dollars, and a desire to see things that aren't described in the science primers."

James O'Hara, being one of H.B.M.'s experi-

ments, could afford to be critical. The average public servant in the remote East does not usually die of a surfeit of prosperity, but to be the *corpus vile* of a Civil Service experiment means acting pay without end and letters after one's name. Jim always had a way of landing on his feet, even in the old Botany Bay days. At the time of which I write he was helping certain Southern authorities to show breadth of mind and a large contempt for utilitarian common sense, and he achieved this by a leisurely absorption of Mandarin dialect. (Happily for the official business of a Crown Colony he rapidly forgot it.) Besides this, and on his own account, he was "cultivating friendly relations with the natives," which is a thing that very few Europeans in China know or care how to do. He took to the Chinese from the day he came among them, as instinctively as some griffins take to horses and others to tennis and gossip with the women. He was in sympathy with them from the very first—with them and their old pagan ways, their *fēng-shui* and traditions, grasping without effort the lines of thought, the daily mysterious nothings that make the life of a Chinaman the enigma that it is. Which, by the way, is the reason why he never pretends to have fathomed the simplest child among them.

The Incumbent had been smoking placidly while we talked, and now he put out the cigar, rubbing it softly on the stone. Then he wrapped up what was left of it in his sleeve cloth and smiled at O'Hara. His usual admiration for my friend had not been diminished by the recent donation to the shrine.

"Ha *lao-yeh*," he said (his way of addressing Jim), "I am old now, and in my time I have seen

many kinds of men among my own people. But I am glad that in my last days you two from overseas have been my friends, you whose words I like to remember in winter when I am alone. It is good to know things which one does not hear spoken of in the tea-house."

"It has been a fair exchange," said Jim ; "you have often taught us more than the teachers."

The old man went on, speaking slowly as he does when he has been thinking.

"Within the four seas all are brethren ; it is a good saying. But most of those who come to us from without the eighteen provinces say it emptily ; even though they know the Four Books by heart, they speak to us as strangers who stay but for a little time. But with you, my friends, it is not so. Were I not an old man, I should travel to see your great country, that Ireland which you say is tributary to the English. Tell me, why is that so ? Here, with us, the Englishman is always beneath the Irish ; it is so in Chihli, it is so in Kwangtung, it is so, men say, in America. This is a hard matter to understand."

"It is because the last of the good men left Ireland when we came away," explained O'Hara.

"But, friend, no politics. Government, in our country, would smell as sweet by any other name. Look, *ho-shang*, there is another hour before vespers ; tell us of the time when our soldiers were camped over yonder in the plain."

"No, Jim," said I, "it is my call for a story. To-day I want to hear, *ho-shang*, how you came to shave your head. You weren't exactly a priest in some of the stories you have told us. Tell us how you got religion."

"It was the will of Heaven," said the old man.

" I will tell you the story, such as it is, but you must not tell it again ; for I am a Tientsin man and the others (even Yü, the head priest who collects the rents) know nothing of me except that my uncle is chief of the Lamas in the Yellow Temple. It is better so."

" Twenty years have passed since I shaved my head and became a servant of Buddha, and I did it because I wanted peace. I longed for a quiet place where I might rest and where men speak but little. That is a long while ago and my heart has now forgotten to feel sorrow, but I am glad I came here ; I have seen enough life. In the old days I ate flesh and to me the five vegetables were forbidden ; now I live without taking life and every day I say the same prayers that other men are saying from Behar to Siam. But all these are but customs, even such as you Christians make also ; they do not change a man's heart. I will tell you what changed mine.

" You have often heard how it happened that I came with my wife to live in Peking. It was just after the great war with England and France, and I had been married two years. Those were the days when the first Legations were being built and furnished, and my father was wise when he opened the carrier's business between Tientsin and the Hata gate ; it was a good trade and we prospered. My father lived at Tientsin, just beyond the bridge of boats, and I looked after the business there in the city ; the beasts were well cared for at both places and there were no middle-men to eat our profits. You must have seen the place which was my shop ; it is just inside the gate where the camels rest. I have heard that Ma, the Mohammedan tobacco-dealer, has it now.

"I lived there for eight years, thinking at first only whether the roads were good or bad, and losing in my work the restlessness that had grown out of many wanderings. But to all who have to expiate the sins of a former life there comes trouble, sooner or later, and mine came to me in its own time—not suddenly, but gradually, as a man's load grows heavier when rain is falling.

"You know, *ta-jēn*, how it is with us. The water-carrier who has a son is happier than the great man who has none. Ancestors and posterity, the desire for these is in our blood before we are born—it has grown in us for ten thousand years, and we cannot change it."

"We too worship our ancestors," I said, "if they died rich and left their portraits painted by famous artists. Not otherwise."

"I know," said the old man, "that in these matters your ways are not as our ways. But you understand me. Well, it was after my third child was born and I saw that it was a girl like the first two, that the weight began to grow heavy on my heart. I would rise in the morning and hear the camels chewing the cud in the yard, and be glad ; and then of a sudden I would remember that I had no son, and all the joy of life would go from me. This was when I had been married six years, and every day the thought lay heavy upon me that there would be no one to support my old age—no one to keep evil spirits from my grave or to burn incense before the tablets. And my wife too, who guessed my thoughts, ate her food in bitterness. She was a good woman, the daughter of my father's friend, and there were never words between us ; there was no need for them, for she was a thrifty wife and knew the beauty

of silence. After our third daughter was born she came to me and said that I should take a second wife—and by that you may know what manner of woman she was. But I would not. If Heaven would give me a son, I said, there was yet time ; but I would never sow seeds of trouble in my own house. A man may pay too dearly for the cloak that hides him from destiny.

“ In those days, as I have told you, I was of the Confucianists. Nevertheless, as my wife begged me, I left the business for two months with a friend, and we made a pilgrimage to the Lama Miao, many days’ journey, beyond the Great Wall. She sat in the cart when the roads were good, and I walked by her side ; and every day she prayed for a son and we gave alms to the temples by the way. We had a letter and presents to the Chief Lama from my uncle, and my wife had worked an embroidered cloth for the altar of Kuanyin. In the fifth month we returned to the city ; in the following spring my son was born and I could look on my neighbours’ children without bitterness.

“ But there ! I do not like to think too much of the year that my son was in my house. I will finish the story quickly and go to my prayers.

“ We had a *nu-ts’ai* under our roof, a girl that my father had bought at the time of the great flood, when she was but four years old. He had given her to me when we came to Peking and she had been a good servant to us, but at times very passionate and strange in her speech. When my son was born she was about eighteen years of age, and that spring the small-pox had marked her and left her more uncertain of temper than before. My wife wanted to get the sorcerers in to exorcise

her evil spirit, but I would not have them ; and I said to the girl that she must get rid of her devil at her own expense—for I did not believe in it then.

“ It happened that on the third day before the festival of the eighth moon I had to go to Mat’ou, on the river, to replace a mule that had broken down in one of the carts. I started at dawn, as soon as the gate was opened, after bidding my wife see to the incoming carriers and take good care of the boy. As I went out, he lay on the *k’ang*, laughing, and his mother was dressing him. And all that day, when I thought of them and my house and my prosperity, I sang as I rode. I sang and I finished my business speedily, and the next day I turned homewards with a light heart. I met no omen by the way, nothing to tell me that my house was desolate and that sorrow had overtaken me.

“ As I rode into the courtyard at evening there was a crowd before my door and the headman of our quarter was standing on the steps. When they saw me they were silent and looked at me strangely, so that great fear came upon me and I dared not ask any questions. Then they made way for me, whispering to each other, and I went into my house. On the *k’ang*, where I had seen her last, my wife lay—dead, though her blood was still warm in her veins. My daughters, the three little useless ones, were in the house and some women were petting them, but my son was not there. Then, as one in a dream, I asked the women how my wife had died ; and they told me how that she had taken opium at noon and killed herself. And by this I knew that my son must be dead also.

" Of what happened that day I remember nothing more ; the neighbours took the three girls away and left me in my empty house, with one of my carters to take care of me. A friend came in and told me that my son was dead and I knew that it was true and said nothing. I did not even ask what they had done with the body. Then came the mourners and the funeral ; my younger brother came from Tientsin and saw to all that was necessary. After that I left my daughters and the business with him and went for a time to live with my father. I did not know why I went, but I was dazed with sorrow and could not stay in the empty house.

" Afterwards, when I began to think again, they told me of the manner of my son's death. It happened on the evening of the day on which I left home that Hung, the servant-girl of whom I have told you, broke a valuable porcelain bowl and my wife called her into the front room to reprove her for her carelessness. There was a neighbour present at the time and the *nu-ts'ai*, angry at losing face before a stranger, answered her mistress with quick words. To punish this insolence my wife had her locked in a small out-house for the night and the evening rice was kept from her. She lay there till morning and the watchman said that she slept—if so, it was because she had planned her revenge quickly.

" In the morning my wife, rising before day-break, opened the door and bade the girl go about her work ; and the slave kotow'd with a humble face and a devil in her heart. My wife saw that the boy was asleep ; so, telling the *nu-ts'ai* to dress the other little ones she went into the kitchen to prepare food—and while she was boiling rice, the

Black Cart passed my door and bore away my son.

" You know the Black Cart ; you have waited for the gates to open before sunrise and seen it, waiting there also to carry out its load and bury it beyond the city walls. The driver never looks at a child ; he finds it on the doorstep, between the night and the dawn, and puts it with the others—not asking its age, nor whether it be alive or dead. To us who sit here among the trees it is horrible even to think of these things, but you know that they are true. And as the people say truly, Peking has no river, as Hankow and Canton have, to dispose of the useless ones who cannot be fed.

" The cart of the southern district finishes its round at the Hata Gate, arriving there as the sun touches the top of the tower, and the houses by the gate are the last where it looks for the little ones. Hung, the *nu-ts'ai*, knew this. While my wife was busy with the food she watched for the cart, and when she heard the driver calling to his mule in the alley beyond the cross-roads, she took my son, the prop of my house, and laid him on the doorstep. And the driver took him up and carried him with the others to the pit beyond the city walls. The girl, having seen the cart pass through the gateway, crossed the street and talked with a servant who was sweeping the courtyard of the 'Golden Pomegranate.' And in a little while she heard my wife calling her from the door of the house, asking her what she had done with the boy. The slave ran to her mistress and lied with lies that were half the truth ; the child had awakened, she said, so that she had taken him in her arms and soothed him to sleep ; and as she walked with him

in the courtyard, her friend at the tea-house had called to her ; so, thinking no harm, she had put the boy on the threshold within the doorway—he could not be gone from there, unless a neighbour had taken him away in jest.

“ And Heaven ordained that the thought of the Black Cart did not come to my wife until it was too late. She was a good woman, and such evil came not easily to her heart. So, while my son was being carried forth with the outcasts, she went to her neighbours, more wrathful than afraid, and asked for the child. At last, when one of the women spoke jestingly of the ‘ Dark Harvester,’ my wife remembered the evil spirit of the girl Hung and the truth came upon her as a hawk falleth upon the reed-birds. Then she ran swiftly and hired the best of the carts that stood at the cross-roads, and bade the man drive furiously, promising him twenty ounces of silver for her son’s life. But, *ta-jēn*, it was no use ; there was a crush of camels at the gates and the road was blocked with much traffic ; therefore, when they came to the place where the nameless ones are laid, the cart was empty and the diggers had covered the pit. Seeing the woman’s sorrow they opened it again, and gave her the body of him who had laughed only two hours before ; and my wife took the little one and returned home, speaking softly and singing to him. There were friends in the courtyard when she reached our house who asked about the boy and told her that Hung, the *nu-ts’ai*, had fled. My wife showed them the child on her bosom and said that all was well. Then she went with it into the inner room to be alone ; and there she swallowed the drug. At noon, when they found her, she was still alive, but two hours later she died.”

"That is the story, my friends. That is why I shaved my head and came to live in the stillness of this quiet shrine where great sorrows cannot come. It is a long time ago, and now, as I sit here and look towards the city, I can bear to think of those days. It is twenty years since I last saw the house near the gate, the house that once held my wife and my son."

The boom of the great bell at Hsiang Chieh Ssù startled the silence of the hill, calling the faithful to prayers and diplomacy to dinner. Chien Shan ceased speaking and for a while we three sat and gazed at the distant roofs of the Forbidden City, flaming like yellow gems in the last of the sunset. Then the old man climbed down from the wall and disappeared into the darkness where he keeps his store of joss-sticks. O'Hara and I sat on, while behind us, Sun, his one-eyed boy, was laying the table for dinner.

"It is a strange people," said O'Hara, as the first words of the Incumbent's prayer broke suddenly on our silence. But then, for the matter of that, so are we. I suppose we are all as God made us—not much better, as a rule."

Jim has his own way of treating the classics.

## At the Sign of the Laughing Gods

THERE are two morals to this story. One, that the long arm of coincidence can easily put a girdle about this little planet of ours ; two, that in China dead men's bones often count for more than the limbs of the living.

The story itself, which had lain submerged for thirty years in some hidden backwater of memory's wayward tide, came back to me, all unexpectedly, as such things do, one afternoon during a recent visit to Peking. I was riding by myself that day, rambling without any definite purpose among the quiet narrow streets which lie between the Hata-men *Ta-chieh* and the eastern wall of the Tartar city ; and my mood was of the sentimental reminiscent kind, which endeavours to recapture something of the fragrance and glamour of bygone happy days.

Those who in middle age revisit the glimpses of joyous suns which shone upon their primrose paths of youth and *wanderlust*, usually find something bitter-sweet in the savour produced by the sights and sounds of old familiar places, by the whispering ghosts of vanished years, that gather at every turn of half-forgotten roads. Mingled with a wistful melancholy of retrospection and heart-stirring memories of the past, there lurks an involuntary subtle complacency, something like unsophisticated pride in a personal achievement,

in the reflection that we ourselves still survive and have our being, still fill our little place in the sun. I know that as I rode that day down the Kou-lan *hutung*, that narrow street between mysterious high-walled dwellings which I came to know by heart in the old days of the Customs Students' Mess, something of this feeling rose unbidden to the surface of a stream of crowded memories. I thought of all the paroxysms and perils of change through which Peking had passed since first I saw it, in the yellow haze of an autumn dust-storm, thirty-six years before. I thought of all the Red-buttoned mighty ones, of whom our Chinese teachers used to speak with such awe, princes and viceroys and governors, whose names are now as swiftly fading shadows on a ruined wall. With these tumultuous years, all the might, majesty, and dominion of the Great Pure dynasty had been swept away, its forbidden sanctuaries invaded, and its high altars defiled ; and yet here was I, an insignificant spectator of that drama, tranquilly revisiting the glory that once was China's capital—a comfortable pilgrim, hoping to feel once again something of the tingling vividness of sensation, the throbbing *joie de vivre*, indissolubly associated in my mind with every early memory of Peking.

And in this narrow street, where no swift tide of traffic has ever run, the sights and sounds that met me on my way all contributed to a pleasing sense of stability, to the illusion of a little oasis of ancient ways inviolate in a wilderness of change. At the red-lacquered gateway of a Bannerman's ancestral home stood one of the old springless carts with a great Szechnen mule between the shafts ; within the doorway, squatting on their

hams, its driver and the gatekeeper were chatting over their long pipes. To the tinkling of brass cymbals, a pedlar of sweetmeats was making his leisurely round, and chubby children snatched a fearful joy as they gambled for sugar-plums with the "lucky bamboos" of his jingling-box. Over-head, a flock of blue-grey pigeons was swiftly circling, and the soft crescendo of their tiny bamboo pipes, as they came up into the wind, sounded, as of old, like the sighing of unhappy household gods. To the outward eye hardly a landmark of the old days was changed. Beneath the sign of the "Prospering Winds" two lads were mixing coal-dust with yellow clay, just as two other lads had done thirty years before ; and at the end of the *hutung*, where it joins the street of Filial Piety, my nose gratefully acknowledged, as of old, the fragrance of sandalwood and pine emanating from the Wang Chia timber-yard, which stands opposite to the Sign of the Laughing Gods.

It was the sight of this old sign-board, a weather-beaten thing of black and gold lacquer, which suddenly recalled to my mind the story of its owner, Kao Shih-lan, maker of Lohan, Buddhas, and other graven images, who, when first I knew him, was the *bête noire* of the Students' Mess, and the undisguised foe of every "foreign devil" who passed his door.

Later, when by the grace of his own gods we had established relations of friendship as nearly intimate as they can ever be between East and West, I came to learn the cause of his grudge against Europeans, and held him justified. Now, remembering his story, and many an hour of good talk passed with him in those far-distant days, I stopped my pony at the door of the timber-yard,

desiring to find out from them, before knocking at Kao's door, into whose hands his business had passed. As he was a middle-aged man when I had last seen him in 1890, I reckoned that by now he must either have been gathered to his fathers, or at all events have given up work.

The timber-yard people told me that he had died in 1900—the year of the Boxer rising,—and that the business had then passed to his second son, the elder having also lost his life during that time of trouble. I wondered whether the old man and his first-born had heard the call of the wild and taken a hand in the siege of the Legations, but it was best to ask no questions. Kao Shih-lan was dead, and although, but for me, that second son would not have lived to worship at his grave, I felt no inclination to introduce myself to him, or to evoke the manifestations of gratitude and filial piety which the occasion would have required. To tell the truth, although I could not have expected to find old Kao alive, to learn that he had been dead for twenty years imparted a distasteful flavour of Old Mortality to my tranquil cud of meditation. The news induced a Rip Van Winkle feeling, intensified by the apparent immutability of the scene in which he had always been associated in my mind as a conspicuous figure. There was the old sign-board, swinging in the wind ; behind the gate-screen, a glimpse of the little courtyard with its slumbering dogs, and of the shop, with its front of cunning lattice-work and windows, half paper and half glass—everything just as it was when first I saw it. And there across the way, pestiferous as ever, was the open drain, in which the present owner of the shop so nearly came to an untimely end. All this immutability of

inanimate things gave one an uncanny feeling.

Letting my pony choose his own leisurely way, I rode on towards the East Gate, but my thoughts remained in the little inner room at the Sign of the Laughing Gods, where, after the incident of the open drain, I had smoked many a pipe of peace with the maker of graven images. It was there that he told me the story which accounted for his hostility to foreigners. Very vividly, as I rode, came moving pictures of those half-forgotten days.

Amongst these, one of the most distinct is that of my first meeting with Kao Shih-lan. I had often seen him before, of course, scowling at us students as we rode past his door ; but though we all longed for a *casus belli*, none of us had ever had speech with him.

One afternoon, however, several of us were going on a picnic to the Princess's Tomb—it was the holiday of the Feast of Lanterns,—and just as we passed Kao's door a fire-cracker exploded right in front of Bessenthal, our German colleague, bringing about the sudden separation which invariably followed when his mount shied. Muddy and wrathful, Bessenthal burst in upon Kao with none of the sangfroid essential in bringing a Chinaman to book, and his subsequent moral collapse was painful to witness. Beginning in voluble Chinese, his command of the language rapidly gave out, and what had been intended for an eloquent fulmination tailed off into senseless sound and fury. (At the best of times Chinese is not the language in which a European can hope to express strong feelings.) When, with a salvo of Rhineland oaths, Bessenthal came to an ignominious end, he found old Kao quietly gazing at him with an expression of placid amusement. Looking

out over the irate foreigner's shoulder, he called to the *mafoo* who was holding Bessenthal's pony in the street. "Come here," he shouted, "and tell me what your *Hsien-sheng* is talking about. I do not understand his foreign tongue."

Sheepishly, as natives talk to each other in the presence of foreigners, the *mafoo* explained about the fire-cracker, while Bessenthal looked on, inwardly raging at the Tower of Babel and certain ordinances of the German Legation which forbade the summary chastisement of natives. Then Kao spoke again—

"Tell your master," he said, "that I am a busy man and have no leisure to watch all the children that pass by. There is a school near here, and this being a festival, some of the little ones fire crackers on their way home. As for those of my household, they are all indoors. They have nothing to do with the matter."

So Bessenthal remounted and we rode on, all conscious of our loss of face; and next day I noticed that Kao's children had new toys.

Thereafter, when passing by the Sign of the Laughing Gods, I always kept an eye open for the dealer in deities, and amused myself by meeting his truculent scowl with a cheery good-day. Gradually I developed a sneaking regard, almost a liking, for the obstinate old heathen. There was a certain charm—call it the charm of variety—in the frankness of his malevolent attitude. It was refreshing to find a Pekinese freely expressing hostility which, in a greater or less degree, they all feel towards the foreigner who has forced his unwelcome way to the heart of the Celestial Kingdom.

Even to this day, gentle reader, it is still the

unpleasant truth that every Chinaman, from Cabinet Minister to coolie, either hates or despises us—often he does both,—and, honestly, I don't see how we can blame him. From his point of view our manners are unspeakable and our morals doubtful. He might overlook these, and regard us with the friendly tolerance which is in his nature, were it not for the fact that all efforts to educate him to our conception of civilisation have ended in his despoilment and humiliation. Therefore, in addition to the usual instinctive sense of superiority, which every healthy nation displays towards its neighbours, the Chinese as a nation feel for the white race the kind of dull resentment which they manifest in regard to plague, pestilence, famine, and all other inscrutable and irresistible visitations of Providence. There is thus no real friendliness between them and us, diplomatic speeches and missionary reports to the contrary notwithstanding ; but the Northern Chinese, as a rule, dissembles his feelings better than his brethren of the south. In a clumsy way he endeavours to make you believe that he enjoys your society—partly from a desire to avoid trouble (which by force of habit he associates with the foreign devil), and partly on the off-chance of making something out of it. If he thus conceals his real feelings, it is also because of the memory of certain forcible object-lessons, and because nature and the race-mind have made him a pacifist philosopher.

Therefore the undisguised scowl on Kao's ugly face appealed to me as the shade of the tree of truth in a desert of make-believe. The very fact that he stood out as an unusual specimen of his race made me desire his better acquaintance. From one of the curio-dealers I learned that he was not a

pukka Pekinese by birth, though he had spent most of his life in the city, and that in some matter connected with foreigners he had once "eaten much bitterness"; but as to the nature of that ancient grudge I could learn nothing. It may seem strange that I should have troubled my head about the surly fellow; but in China, when you have lived through half the rainy season seeing the same half-dozen white faces, discussing the same threadbare topics, and doing the same unprofitable things day after day, you must either cultivate an intelligent interest in the life of the natives or take to drink. Which may account for the consumption of whisky at the lesser Treaty ports.

In the natural order of things I might have gone on for ever fussing at the secret behind Kao's black looks. I knew that any attempt to conciliate him would be worse than useless, for when a European (either Government or individual) makes friendly overtures to hostile Orientals, it amounts to asking for trouble, and even when harmonious relations are established it is hard for us to get to know much about the inner thoughts of the Chinese. Time and much patience are needed to bridge the gulf which divides their philosophy of life from ours. So I had to content myself with chaffing the cantankerous fellow, and lashing at his yap-ping dogs whenever a chance offered.

But at the time of the heavy rains Fate intervened, and put me in the way of laying the idol-maker under a heavy obligation, probably the only one that he would ever have acknowledged. His younger son, a lad of about six, while flying a kite in the street of Filial Piety, stepped backwards into the open drain. He had fallen upon a bad day, for the drain, usually a dry ditch, was so

swollen by the rains that it held a swift current. It would speedily have carried him towards the main street, where the drain becomes a brick tunnel, had I not chanced to be riding that way. Luckily, I was just in time to save the boy. A crowd collected, of course, in the twinkling of an eye, and a woman told me the half-drowned youngster was the son of Kao Shih-lan. I carried him into his father's shop.

Considering the procreative capacity of the race, and its consequently appalling infant mortality, it would seem as if one atom of Chinese infancy more or less should not matter very much ; broadly speaking, of course, it doesn't. But this particular child, happening to be the only son of his mother (Kao's second wife), was a person of considerable importance in his own circle. It was interesting to see Kao struggling with his mixed feelings ; gratitude won the day, but his surliness towards Europeans was a fixed habit not easily discarded at a moment's notice. He could not help thanking his gods that a foreigner had witnessed the accident, knowing that his own people are not given to interfering with Providence in cases of drowning. His rugged honesty was compelled to give us credit for a virtue that had touched him so nearly, so that before I could make my way through the crowd of women-folk he had said several pleasant and courteous things. I went home, wondering whether his scowl would come back, and if not, whether I might some day learn how and why he had "eaten bitterness" at the hands of white men.

After that eventful day Kao made an honourable exception in my favour in the matter of incivility. His two sons were taught to smile at me as I passed instead of shouting "*Yang Kuei-tzu*" from behind

the gate-screen, and sometimes on my way home I used to stop and smoke a pipe in his courtyard. He liked to talk about his trade, and told me curious tales about the little ways of the keepers of some of the shrines for which he made his ridiculous gods. Personally, he was not much of a believer in his own wares ; indeed, his knowledge of the attributes of the various Buddhist deities was curiously vague, but he was very skilful in fashioning Buddhas, Kuan-yins, and the lesser gods, either of brass or lacquered wood. He used to let me watch him at his work, and after a while, when the weather grew cold, he would invite me to take a cup of tea in his inner room.

Thus it came about, one winter's afternoon some six months later, that he told me the reason of his hatred of foreigners in general, and Englishmen in particular. We were sitting on the mat-covered *kang*, and he was busy applying the first coating of gold-leaf to a Lohan, destined to find its way to the British Legation, by way of the Lama Temple. He had been telling me that his father had lived at Hai-Tien, some miles to the north of the city, and I had asked him how he and his people had fared when the British and French troops were in that neighbourhood in 1860, when the Summer Palace and the pleasure domes of Yuen-Ming-Yuen were looted and destroyed.

"*Tajen*," he said, stopping in his work and filling a pipe, "I am a Chinese and you are from the outside countries, but you have saved the life of my son, and are to me as an older brother. I have never spoken to you of those days, although they are always in my heart, but since you ask me I will tell you of the evil which they brought to me and to

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my house. When you have heard, you will understand why I do not love your people."

The story of that old-time grudge of his was a long one, and needed several cups of tea in the telling. It dated back to the days when the Allied armies of England and France were camped in the Anting Plain. I shall not attempt to tell the whole tale as he told it, but will set forth the main facts, at the outset observing that, in order to realise Kao's conception of the seriousness of the outrage committed, one must remember the sacro-sanctity of ancestors in the eyes of the Chinese.

On the day after the appearance of the Allied forces before the northern wall of Peking, Kao Shih-lan and his father were busy completing certain repairs at the family burial-ground, a walled enclosure westward from Hai-Tien towards the hills. Like every one else, they had heard all sorts of alarming rumours about the ferocity of the invulnerable foreign devils, who had routed all the armies of the Son of Heaven, but no word had reached them of any sign of the invaders near Hai-Tien ; and in any case Kao's father had decided that the hardships and perils of flight outweighed the risks of sticking to his home. They were therefore terror-stricken when at sunset, just as they were leaving off work, a small body of Sikh cavalry ("big men with black faces and long lances," was Kao's description) suddenly came round a bend of the road, making straight towards them. There was no cover anywhere except amongst the fir-trees of the graveyard, so there they crouched. But, as luck would have it, the squadron was looking for a good place to pitch camp for the night, and chose the burial-ground, so Kao and his father were discovered. Having no

weapons, they were not ill-treated, beyond being tied, with their queues together, to a tree, and losing their portable property at the hands of the Cantonese camp-follower who acted as interpreter. Later on, when the men had seen to their horses and sentries had been posted, the white officer in command ordered them to be untied. They were given some food, and told that next morning they would be allowed to return to Hai-Tien. So far, they had been agreeably surprised at their treatment, for the rumour had been widely put about that the Indian soldiery were cannibals.

But when the black men came to prepare their food a terrible thing happened. For the cook, to save himself the trouble of making an oven, opened up the brick tomb of Kao's grandfather (an expectant Prefect of some fifty years' decay); moreover, he used the hardwood coffin of that deceased worthy as a receptacle for garbage and the coffin-lid as fuel. The bones of the departed were unceremoniously strewn about. Kao's father implored the Cantonese to intercede for him with the white officer and prevent the sacrilege, but the scoundrel only laughed in his face. To crown all, another white man who appeared upon the scene some hours later and remained chatting a while with the officer in command, noticed the skull of the expectant Prefect on the ground, picked it up, and having tied it to his saddle, rode off with it into the night. Therefore, as Kao put it, his grandfather's ghost was condemned to wander miserably by the Yellow Springs of Hades for ten thousand years, while he himself was for ever shamed in the presence of the ancestral tablets.

Even in those early days I had learned enough about the hoary tradition and superstitions of the

Chinese concerning their dead, to realise that it would be useless to attempt to console the maker of graven images with any philosophical reflections on the futility of endeavouring to preserve intact our mortal coil, or to make him realise that the ultimate end of all skulls, whether in their graves or out of them, is the dust-heap. Nothing that I could say would alter the fact that, with this ancient people, a dead rogue hath more honour than a living paragon. As he unfolded the tale of his undying grudge, I realised how deeply he must have felt the desecration of that burial-ground, and could sympathise with his consequent hatred for all foreign devils, black and white.

But when he came to the end of the story and the purloining of his grandfather's skull, suddenly I perceived the long arm of coincidence putting its miraculous girdle round the earth. In a flash my mind went back to a room in a house amongst the heather and pines of the West Cliff at Bournemouth, a man's snugger, all hung about with trophies of war and *shikar* in many lands. The room, to be precise, belonged to a Colonel Widdicombe, an uncle of mine, who as a subaltern in Desborough's battery had taken a hand in the shelling of the Summer Palace. And in that snugger, as plainly as when first I discovered them in their curtained alcove, I saw a shelf full of grinning skulls—six of them in a row—which the old warrior, with a hobby for anthropology, had collected as souvenirs of his six campaigns. Each skull was neatly labelled with the name and date at which it was acquired, and one, as I well remembered, bore the legend "Peking, 1860." As skull-collecting is not a pastime to which military men are usually addicted, I had no doubt in my mind that this was the long-lamented

head-piece of the late expectant Prefect. As I sat there on Kao's stove-bed I had the creepy sensation of being a predestined puppet playing a minor part in a shadow-play plotted by mysterious Oriental gods. The Chinese, of course, would explain the matter more simply. They would say that the expectant Prefect, or his ancestors, had acquired merit sufficient to make it incumbent upon the Shining Ones to redress any injury inflicted by foreign or other devils. My rôle, at all events, seemed clear enough.

"Kao *Chang-kuei-ti*," I said, when his tale was told, "we live in a strangely small world, and the ways of the gods are inscrutable. My words may sound to you like foolishness, and wind in the ear. Nevertheless, I believe that in a little while your grandfather's spirit may cease from wandering forlornly by the Yellow Springs, for I may be able to recover that which was taken from your burial-ground thirty years ago. I believe that I know the man who took the skull, and that he has it still."

"*Hsien-Sheng*," he replied, "if what you say is true, then of a surety it must be that in a former incarnation we two were blood-brothers. It is no small thing that you, a foreigner from afar, should have saved the life of my son ; if now you can restore serenity to the wandering spirit of my revered ancestor, how can I ever requite such benefits ?"

"If I succeed in getting back the skull, my friend, all I ask is that you shall forget an injury unwittingly committed. Remember that everywhere in war-time things are done which decent folks condemn, and do not hate a whole nation for one man's misdeeds."

"You are right," he replied ; "at all events I have learned from you the truth of our sage's

saying that 'within the Four Seas all are brethren.' "

For a little while he sat lost in deep thought, puffing at his water-pipe. I, too, was silent, thinking of the fateful fingers of the long arm of coincidence and the strange whirligig of Time. Then I noticed that something was worrying Kao. His cheerful expression had given way to one of uneasiness ; there were wrinkles of doubt on his troubled brow.

"*Hsien-Sheng*," he said, "I trust your word, and have no doubt that you believe you know the man who took away my grandfather's skull, and can persuade him to return it. But you may be mistaken. After all, there were many graves in China and many soldiers in your army."

It had occurred to me, of course, that Kao might need to be convinced of the authenticity of any skull restored to his ancestral grave, and that the ghost of the expectant Prefect would in no wise be placated by coffining any old head-piece with his remains. At the same time, I felt fairly sure in my mind that his was the only skull which had left North China with the British Army.

"Would you be able to tell if it were the right one ?" I asked.

"I think so," he replied ; "for I remember that my grandfather had lost nearly all his upper teeth on one side—the result of a kick from a vicious pony. It gave his face a twisted expression."

"Let your mind be at ease," I said ; "in three or four months, we shall know. As for me, I am certain that before long your ancestor will rest in peace."

And so it turned out. I had no difficulty in persuading the colonel to exchange the skull for a much more interesting specimen—a sacrificial

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altar-piece, bought from a priest at the Yellow Temple ; and Kao, having satisfied his doubts as to its identity, returned it to its grave with much kowtowing and burning of joss-paper. In memory of the occasion he gave me a pair of Laughing Buddhas, cunningly wrought in sandalwood by one of the most famous craftsmen of the days of Yung Cheng ; and thereafter no European was ever called "foreign devil" in the neighbourhood of the Laughing Gods.

## Starflower

CHANG SAN, better known to the underworld of Soochow as the Crab, crouched in his tattered mat-shed and ate bitterness. From all the other hovels around and about him, on the beggars' squatting ground that lies between the city wall and the Canal, arose the pungent smoke of straw fires, cooking the evening meal. In most of them women, sorry hags in scarecrow garments, hovered about the rice-pot. At the garbage heaps under the wall, children were busily searching the upper layers of refuse for scraps of food and fuel, all heedless of the rain that came driving in sharp gusts before the cold north wind. But for the Crab tonight there was none to gather fuel or to boil the rice. He must needs fend for himself or go hungry, and as he brooded in his discontent, his sorrow's crown of sorrow was remembering happier things. For, until yesterday, he could leave the lesser cares that infested his day to little Pai-t'ou, his slave and humble satellite, whose starveling ribs and leprous head had proved a very serviceable stock-in-trade ever since the day when he had bought him for a dollar from his starving parents, in the year of the great famine up north. And now, little Pai-t'ou was dead, his brief candle of life snuffed out by the wintry winds of affliction, and his little body, thrust into a kerosene box, lay yonder in the shadow of the wall. Therefore Chang San ate bitterness ;

and because he was a hard man, grasping and given to anger, he sat unfriended and alone. Even the lowest of these outcasts stood aloof from him, casting timid sidelong glances in his direction ; for the name of the Crab was a thing of fear among the pariahs. Spreading a grimy piece of matting on the driest spot in his foul lair, and producing from his wallet a few fragments of stale food, he looked out with scowling face upon the sodden scene and brooded gloomily upon the days to come.

To the shopkeepers and citizens of Soochow the Crab had long been a familiar figure. For many years he had frequented the neighbourhood of the Pan-Men, dragging himself slowly along the pavement on his canvas-padded knees, with pitifully twisted legs drawn up under his thighs, asking alms of the compassionate and levying regular and insolent toll on the shopmen, in the name of the Beggars' Guild. He had never worked his beat single-handed. Always, as he made his rounds from door to door, or when he sat mumbling blessings on the charitable amidst the throng of traffic at the water-gate, there had been with him a little child,—some wretched waif, whose hungry eyes and forlorn condition helped to cajole cash from the tender-hearted. Most of these decoys had been little girls, more easily come by than boys, as a rule, in the beggars' trade ; but none of them had even been half so useful or so handy, after the day's round was done, as little Pai-t'ou. With him to forage and tend the fire, Chang San could afford to smoke and take his evening ease, first removing his knee-straps and restoring his cramped limbs to their normal efficiency. And now Pai-t'ou was dead ; one more evil turn in the Wheel of Calamity.

A vertical rectangular painting depicting a traditional Chinese waterway scene. In the upper portion, a long, narrow boat with several figures is shown moving along a canal. The boat has a dark hull and a light-colored deck. The surrounding environment is rendered in soft, muted tones of grey, blue, and green, suggesting a misty or overcast day. In the lower portion, there are dense, dark foliage and trees lining the banks of the canal.

A WATERWAY OF SOOCHOW

*From the painting by Mary Macleod*







The Crab looked out upon the rain-swept scene and cursed the sorry scheme of things entire. But cursing would not fill the rice-bowl ; he must find another brat without delay. Therefore, having finished his scanty meal, Chang San drew a leather pouch from his belt, counted his money, and in the gathering dusk, made his way to the bank of the Canal. There he hired a slipper-boat, and handling the tricky craft with surprising strength and skill, made his way swiftly past the Pan-Men. Thence, steering with the stern oar and rowing with his feet, he sped northwards, passing like a sinister shadow through sleeping towns and villages, threading his silent way unchecked through long backwaters and winding creeks.

An Fu-lin had started at daybreak, as befits a thrifty farmer, with a basket of ducks for sale at the market at Wusieh. The sun had now come over the edge of the world and the farmer's wife was busy indoors, cleaning and mending her silk-worm trays against the coming spring. And so, as the gods of misfortune would have it, little Starflower was left to her own devices for an hour, and rejoicing in the fact, stole off by herself to play in the bamboo grove that shaded the creek at the back of the house. Little Starflower, eight years old and the farmer's only child, was accustomed to having her own way, and dearly loved the whispering voices of the bamboo grove, where the grey squirrels play and the cock pheasants crow in the dawning. This morning her adventurous spirit was rewarded with a new delight, for as she stood by the water's edge, a dainty little blue figure against the vivid green of the bamboos, a boat came slowly towards her down the creek, and in its bows

a gorgeous paper windmill glittered and turned, uncommonly alluring to the eye. When the boat stopped, quite close to the shelving bank where the buffalo was doing his patient penance at the wheel, the little windmill still continued merrily spinning in the breeze. Starflower, seeing that the boatman was busy with something in the bottom of his boat, drew closer. Then the man looked up, and in his hand was a long gilded wand, strung with candied crab-apples. The man had an unpleasant face, even when he smiled, but Starflower was very fond of candied sweets. "Which would you like, little girl," said the man, "the windmill or the sweets?" Starflower remembered that her mother had warned her never to talk to strangers, but surely this must be a kind-hearted man. So she drew a little closer to the boat. "Come here," said the man, "and take whichever you will." Just then the child heard her mother's voice calling to her from the corner of the house. The man was holding the windmill in one hand and the candy in the other. "I think I would like the windmill," said Starflower, "and please be quick : Mother is calling me." Chang San was very quick. Five minutes later the slipper-boat had vanished in the maze of traffic of the Grand Canal, and little Starflower, half senseless from a cuff on the head and utterly terrified, lay with her face on the matting between the rower's swiftly moving knees. Pai-tou's place was filled. That night she came to the mat-shed hovel under the shadow of the city wall.

It was necessary for the success of Chang San's business that misery, heart-moving misery, should be part of the stock-in-trade of his decoys. Therefore little Starflower must speedily forget that she

had ever known health or happiness ; her body must be in keeping with the filthy rags in which the Crab now clothed her, and her mind must be so dazed with pain and fear that she would never dare to tell her tale to any passer-by. That which had to be done, Chang San did quickly ; for the loss of even a day's earnings irked him, and he knew that several days must pass before he could take the child out upon the streets. Quickly, therefore, he cut the tendons of her little arms above the elbow and then, with bandages tightly tied and moistened, he so twisted the limbs as to give them the appearance of a long-standing deformity. For three days and nights, the child's piteous wailing aroused the curiosity of the beggars' camp ; it even evoked a little pity, for amongst these outcasts there were mothers, who knew what it meant for a child to fall into the hands of Chang San. But none dare question him. In due course he gave it out, to the few with whom he had speech, that he had bought a new slave girl, and had got her cheap because she was sickly and deformed. Finally there came a day when, her wounds having healed under their tight bandages, little Starflower looked out from the Crib's mat-shed upon a world, all grey and hideous, which, to her dazed senses, seemed to fit in with all the horror of a dreadful dream. These foul rags, her bent and tortured arms, the new name that Chang San had given her, the hunger and the blows,—and now this awful place, with demons in human form, mangey dogs and scrofulous children, all scrambling for the scourings of the gutter. She must have been bewitched. Surely this terrible dream would pass, and she would awake, to find herself once more in the bamboo grove by the creek.

But the dream did not pass, nor the torture of her stiffening arms, nor the terror of the evil man whose word must be swiftly obeyed. As the days went by, and pain and fear became all her daily life, their paralysing effect left body and mind alike benumbed, so that gradually she came to do the Crab's bidding almost unconsciously. Each morning she walked slowly beside him as, on his knees, he dragged himself from door to door, and her pitiful condition brought much wealth of cash to his bowl. At his bidding she learned to whine the beggars' chant and to importune the well-dressed passers-by with mournful appeals. And the Crab, counting the day's take at eventide, had every reason to be pleased with his latest bread-winner.

At fairs and public festivals, Starflower's wistful face and timid voice brought more grist to his mill than ever he had got in Pai-t'ou's best days. The Luckless One, as she was called, bid fair to prove a very profitable investment. Dreaming new dreams of hoarded wealth, he even decided that the child was an asset of sufficient value to justify him in providing her with regular meals. Thanks to her, it seemed, the wind of prosperous fortune was once more blowing steadily. The gods gave no forewarning of the rapids of affliction, towards which a tide of retribution was swiftly bearing him.

At noon on the day of the Feast of Lanterns, the Crab was squatting near the angle of the water-gate and the little Luckless One had crossed the road, at his bidding, to crave alms of a sturdy countryman, who was passing in on his way to the city. She had followed him timidly a little way, when the man turned round to rebuke her. No

sooner had she seen his face than the child ran to him, cowering against his knees, and burst into a storm of passionate weeping. "Uncle," she cried, "oh take me away, quickly, away from that wicked man. Take me home to mother." Then, seeing the Crab swiftly shuffling towards her, she screamed with terror and fainted.

"She speaks truly," said the countryman to the rapidly growing crowd. "This is my brother's only child. One morning, two months ago, she disappeared and they thought that she had been drowned in the creek. But, behold, this villain has stolen her, and see now what a thing of misery he has made of her. Two months ago she was a hale and healthy child, my brother's little girl."

"This is more of the Crab's foul work," said one of the onlookers, old Sun, who kept the orange-stall close by the gate. "Who knows how many little ones have suffered at his hands?"

At this there arose a murmuring and a movement of the crowd towards Chang San, now crouching by the wall, silent and fearful of impending doom. "Aiyah," cried one, "come, let us stone him and give his carcass to the dogs. While such brutes are allowed to live, no man's children are safe." But by this time the blocking of the gate traffic and the increasing tumult of voices had brought the police upon the scene, and they took Chang San in charge. Quelling the excited crowd by telling them that the trial would be swift and the judgment a warning to all such evil-doers, they put their prisoner into a jinricksha and took him directly to the Yamen of the District Magistrate. The countryman followed close behind, with Starflower in his arms. Rhadamanthus, visibly impressed by the nature and the evidence of the case,

as set forth by the farmer, and by the seething anger of the crowd, was not long in delivering judgment.

This, he said, is no ordinary case of kidnapping, for which the punishment is death, but in very truth devil's work, for which the prisoner should suffer a devilish punishment. "Let him therefore be taken out forthwith and beaten to death with the heavier bamboo in the precincts of the Court." So the lictors led forth the Crab, and like a dog they beat him till he died, and his body they cast to the dogs beyond the City walls. In his belt they found fifteen silver dollars and these they gave to little Starflower in token of their compassion. And the farmer, advised by the judge, hurried with the child in his arms to the foreigners' hospital where, as all men know, the wise doctors of the West work many miracles.

That evening in the beggars' camp, when according to custom the Crab's mat-shed, rice-bowl, rags and rubbish had been divided by lot, there was much talk and some trembling amongst the ragged outcasts, because of the swiftness of his fearful death. But none grieved at his passing ; for he was ever a hard man, grasping, and full of bitter words.

## PART II

# Memories of M'Quigg

### I

#### PEKING IN THE DOG DAYS

LIFE at Peking during the dog days of July and August is usually a dull and dreary business nowadays for the humble remnant of the foreign community which perforce remains to endure the sandstorms and stinks of the city, what time the Diplomatic Body and the missionaries and most of the women of the Customs Inspectorate have moved out to their various summer quarters in the temples of the western hills and at the seaside bungalows of Peitaiho.

It was not always so. In the good old days, before the building of the railway from Tientsin, the jolly easy-going 'eighties and 'nineties, Peitaiho was still worlds away, and even the western hills were none too easy to get at in the rainy season. Most of the little world of the Diplomatic Body was then well content to pass its long lotus-eating noons in the slumbrous shade of the spacious Legation compounds, emerging thence to tea and tennis and tittle-tattle at the funny old ramshackle club under the shadow of the Tartar wall. In those leisurely days life in the little western oasis of the

Chinese capital, far from the hurly-burly of buyers and sellers, was a sort of glorified family-party picnic, dignified always by the punctilious ceremonial of diplomatic etiquette, and enlivened by the little storms, born of feminine amenities or Chancery jealousies, which from time to time disturb the diplomatic tea-cup. Which of us who knew Peking before China became the unhappy hunting-ground of concession syndicates and cosmopolitan financiers, has not preserved a rich store of sunlit memories, fragrant recollections of the time when Lady Walsham at the British Legation, Mrs. Denby at the American, and the great "I. G.," dispensed their genial heart-warming hospitality ? And those long summer days, with their picnics among the ruined splendours of the Summer Palace and Yuen Ming Yuen, cricket and polo matches in the grounds of the Temple of Heaven, and rambles among the curio-shops of the Liu Li-chang and the booths of the Lung Fu-ssü, how they linger in the memory with a charm imperishable, all their own ! It was lazy lotus-eating, no doubt, but dignified by a sense of the unknown worlds of mystery and romance that encompassed us round about in the Forbidden City, and relieved from monotony by the cosmopolitan quality of the lotus-eaters, gathered together, cheek by jowl, under fourteen national flags. The serpent of commercialism had not yet reared its ugly head in this exotic Eden of diplomacy. Gracefully persisting in *la carrière's* pet delusion, that it represents the policies of princes and potentates rather than the interests of traders, the heirs of all the ages of the West at Peking pursued their leisurely and losing game of statecraft with the courteous crafty Oriental, undisturbed as yet by any clamour of

money-changers or the importunities of the bagmen of "big business." No shadow of coming events had been cast upon the *dolce far niente* of an existence that was always, or nearly always, afternoon. Neither merchants nor banks were represented in the polyglot society which gathered to hear "Pinafore" and "Patience" murdered by Sir Robert Hart's Manchu band at his weekly garden-parties. Such strangers as came to partake of the stately hospitality of the Legations, or the primitive simplicity of the Hôtel de Pékin, were usually either earnest politicians, intent on establishing a rapid reputation for special knowledge of the East, or globe-trotters of the meditative type, the sort that used to turn up in a leisurely way, with letters of introduction from India, Burmah, and Siam, intending to stay a couple of weeks, and then remain contentedly pottering about the city and suburbs for months and months. These rare visitants the Legation quarter usually took to its bosom, because they brought with them a breath of the outer world ; moreover, they provided the occasion for a reassortment of places, and some variation of the well-worn topics, customary at diplomatic entertainments. When, in dutiful obedience to the law of precedence, the wife of the Minister for Utopia had gone into dinner on an average twice a week for six months with the Minister for Alsatia, had sympathised with all his grievances and laughed at all his jokes, it was only natural that she should welcome any stranger within her gates and make him wish to linger. Also the stranger deserved some reward, for in those days the journey from Tientsin meant either two days on horseback, or five days in an unsavoury and verminous native boat ; and despite its romantic

and picturesque fascination, Peking, beyond the grateful shade of the Legation oasis, required from its visitors a philosophical detachment in regard to many things which struck the eyes and nose with remarkable force. Even to-day, though the main streets have been levelled and metalled, and their scavenging is no longer left to dogs and pigs and kites, China's ancient capital can hardly be described as a delectable place of summer residence for the fastidious. Its peculiar and enduring charm has a subtle and instinctive quality aloof from the amenities of sanitary civilisation, a quality which dwells in the dust of countless generations, whose voice is the ghostly whispering of tutelary spirits innumerable.

But this oasis of tranquillity passed with the Boxer rising, and the world on which the Legations now look out has greatly changed since the day in August, 1900, when the Sikhs battered their way through the water-gate by the Chien Men. Beneath the battlemented walls that of old guarded the Via Sacra to the Forbidden City, two railway stations add their shrill alien clamour to the deep ceaseless murmur of the street traffic ; and by the old water-gate stands the Wagons-lits Hotel, in hideous but eloquent evidence of the truth that the Flowery Kingdom's splendid isolation is a thing of the past. Gone, with the Dragon Throne and all its pageantry of stately splendour, is the atmosphere of profound seclusion in which the soul of the old Buddha rejoiced. On Legation Street half a dozen banks testify to the activities of cosmopolitan finance, and the agencies of "big business" have established themselves conspicuously around and about the Yellow Walls of the Imperial City, which for sixty years had kept them at a respectful dis-

tance. By every train, from Tientsin and Nanking and Hankow, come tourists of the hustling get-wise-quick type, whose motor-cars jostle the camels on their meditative way to the Great Wall, and whose rickshaws profane even the sacred precincts of the Temple of Heaven and the shrine of Confucius.

Yet even to-day the stream of globe-trotters and bagmen dwindles to a tiny trickle in the dog days, partly because, as I have said, Peking under its summer sun is not exactly a city of fragrant dreams, and partly because the same highways of progress which have let the invasion in, have let the Legations out ; so that, for social or business purposes, there is very little doing. The coming of the railways has, in fact, enabled the Diplomatic Body to follow its world-wide and firmly-established custom of removing itself in summer to watering-places and other cool retreats, sufficiently inaccessible and remote from the capital to allow it to enjoy its *otium cum dignitate* undisturbed. Therefore, what time the Chiao-Min-Hsiang begins to swelter under the June sun and the city covers itself with a patchwork of mat-sheds, their Excellencies shake off the unsavoury dust of the capital and the perplexities of "pidgin," and get them to the comfortable seclusion of seaside bungalows at Peitaiho or Tsingtao, where the Yamêns cease from troubling. Thanks to the railway, diplomacy at Peking has secured the sort of midsummer siesta, the close season for sordid business, to which *la carrière* has always been accustomed, the lack of which in olden days supplied a never-ending grievance to secretaries and attachés fresh from Rome or Washington or Rio de Janeiro ; and Chinese officialdom, or rather that small section of it whose duty it is to keep the insatiable foreigner

at arm's length, witnesses their annual exodus with a sigh of unspeakable relief. It retires, then, to the cool mat-shedded courtyards of its *kung kuan*, and rejoicing in the amenities of its multitudinous domesticity, discards its fearsome frock-coat and other evidences of European uplift, blissfully mindful of the fact that, until their Excellencies return in September, the Chanceries may be trusted to provide the breezy persiflage of a junior attaché or the bureaucratic haughtiness of a Chinese Secretary to discourage any unseasonable and unreasonable activities on the part of concessionaires, importunate creditors, and other exponents of Western "progress." The mandarin disposes himself to rest and recreation, knowing full well that in the unlikely event of an over-zealous or harassed pro-Consul disturbing his repose with some foolish question of urgency, an intimation that it can only be discussed with His Excellency in person will effectively relegate it to some more convenient season.

Since the exciting (and, for the Legations, most disturbing) days of the Russo-Japanese War, when all the old ideas of China's international relations had to be revised and readjusted to an entirely new situation, the Diplomatic Body's process of diathermal hibernation, this period of recuperative *dolce far niente*, has become so general and habitual that the handful of disgruntled foreigners whom business or force of habit compels to remain in the city are like unto the Psalmist's pelican in the wilderness or the mournful sparrow on the house-top. The money-changers and those who have serious trade in view remain, of course, at their receipts of custom ; each Legation is represented, for decency's sake, by a few derelicts, who idly sit and

hear each other groan ; and most of the imported advisers and off-stage prompters in the pay of the Chinese Government earn a portion of their salaries by the sort of patient service which is content to stand and wait. There are also a few orientalised individuals, who honestly prefer the burden and heat of the day in the city to seaside domesticity *en déshabillé*, and a sprinkling of devoted wives who refuse to desert Micawber or "nurse in some delicious solitude their slothful lives." To complete the list of those who forgather towards tea-time at the Club, there is always the flotsam and jetsam of the Wagons-lits and other hotels, composed of wandering authors and journalists in search of local colour, would-be concessionaires, free-lance financiers, benevolent faddists, curio-hunters, globe-trotters, and forlorn-hope adventurers. Nowhere on earth, indeed, will you find a more miscellaneous and motley collection of human beings than that which plays desultory tennis, and acrimonious bridge in six languages, during the dog days at the Peking Club.

For myself, having no mind for these pastimes, and being tied to the city by business of a kind which necessitated soft answers by cable to inquiries from energetic people on the other side of the globe, who failed to appreciate either the nature or the necessity of comatose intervals in Chinese affairs, I might have found Peking in summer-time somewhat dull, but for the fact that the slumbering atmosphere of the ancient city was then more racy of the soil, more imbued with the true colour and flavour of native life, than when the encroaching tide of Western ways flowed restlessly before one's eyes, threatening the venerable fabric of old Cathay at its base. Very pleasant and instructive in the

cool of the evening was a stroll on the deserted city wall, or a ride out through the North Gate to the Anting plain, chewing the cud of retrospective meditation undisturbed, and watching the patient kindly citizens of the sorely chastened old city doing the day's work, or taking their hard-won ease, in the same places and in the same ways as their forefathers did, in the old times before them, steadfastly following the paths of immemorial tradition. Pleasant also were the long afternoons of desultory bargaining over the tea-cups in the cool inner chamber of the old-fashioned curio-dealers of the Soochow Hu-tung, genial and courteous connoisseurs who, in the leisure of this slack season, would sit and talk by the hour of the treasures they had handled in happier days, or tell many lamentable tales of the lootings of 1900. And very grateful after dark to smoke a meditative pipe under one's own mat-shed, beneath a sky of velvet jewelled with stars, and hear the familiar lingering cries of the dumpling and bean-curd hawkers on their clockwork rounds, voices that, like the laws of the Medes and Persians, pass down unchanged from one generation to another.

When weary of solitude, one could always stroll around at coffee-time to the lounge of the Wagons-lits Hotel, and from the polyglot company there gathered together in little furtive groups, get an inkling of possible developments in the two worlds of high finance and low politics. Even at the height of the dog days there was usually a remnant of guests in that exotic caravanserai—curio-hunters wise in their generation, globe-trotters of the non-gregarious kind, and, in the background, moving inconspicuously, a few persistent representatives of the enterprising class whose business

it is to persuade Chinese officials to buy things, from a battleship to a telephone (which the Celestial Government can never put to any real use), and to pay for them by pledging the last remnants of China's credit. Then there were the journalists, native and foreign, who forgathered at cocktail time to take note of any new-comers by the Tientsin express, and to speculate on the nature and significance of their business. There was, in fact, no lack of food for thought in the human comedy, as played on the shifting scenes of the Wagons-lits. Also one could often pick up a good deal of information in the process, especially if on good terms with the innocent-looking native vendor of amber, turquoise, jade, and other kickshaws, who sat with listless eyes in his corner by the door, and added considerably to his trade profits by supplying inquisitive Legations with information about Chinese official visitors and their doings.

And if, *à la longue*, one felt a craving for good companionable talk to dispel the cobwebs of routine and rumination, was there not always M'Quigg as a *pièce de résistance*, kindliest and wisest of philosophers, ready to discuss every subject under the sun into the wee sma' hours with kindred spirits—M'Quigg, who knew more about the wheels within wheels of Chinese affairs than all the bankers and bagmen of big business put together. How often, when the city lay torpidly sweltering under a breathless storm-laden sky, have the cares that infested my working day passed, all happily forgotten, into the starlit night, as I lounged on a long deck-chair in his little courtyard, among the tubs of gold-fish and the oleanders, and listened to his crowded memories of the past and shrewd prophecies of the future ! There was nothing

either of the cynic or the sentimentalist about this grizzled Ulsterman, who late in life had come to anchor in an old Chinese house in the unfrequented lane under the wall, where of old days the Korean ginseng traders dwelt. In the thirty odd years of his varied and wandering life in China, his outlook upon life had become deeply imbued with the passive agnosticism of the East and the doctrine of the happy mean, but this Oriental philosophy was tempered by a whimsical native humour and an insatiable curiosity concerning the eternal vagaries of the human atom. He spoke the mandarin dialect like a native, and had studied Chinese history and literature to good purpose, but his shrewd common sense had preserved him from the peril of pursuing the seductive path of Oriental scholarship into the sterile wilderness of the Sinologues.

It is some years now since M'Quigg passed for the last time through the Hsi pien-men to rest in that peaceful little cemetery where the pine and the pomegranate make a grateful oasis in a sandy waste, but the memory of the man, and of ambrosial hours gratefully spent in his little grey house under the wall, dwells imperishably in the heart of many a wayfarer in far Cathay. For his was the generous and well-seasoned wisdom, blended of common sense and scholarly lore, that gave freely to the passer-by, and had even learned to suffer gladly the not uncommon type of fool whose business or pleasure it is to hustle the East. M'Quigg himself, of course, you could never hustle. He had heard the East a-calling so clearly that his attitude towards life in general resembled in many ways the measured and unruffled poise prescribed by Confucian scholars as marking the Superior Man, the sort of dignified mixture of bonhomie and dilet-

tantism that used to distinguish the Viceroys of the old régime. This instinctive and cultivated sympathy with the soul of the East had gained for him a measure of respect among the Chinese seldom achieved by foreigners, and a reputation which, had he so desired, might have been used to lucrative purposes. But his philosophy had escaped the two rocks upon which the native wisdom of the East is so often wrecked, to wit, the lust for money and the love of progeny. He had remained a bachelor, because, though loving women well, he loved his freedom more, and possibly because the brief years of his romantic youth had been spent in lonely places, unfrequented by white women of the marriageable sort. As for money, before coming to anchor in Peking, he had picked up enough in the course of many years' traffics and discoveries to suffice for the necessities of life and the gratification of a few modest hobbies. If he continued to keep a mixed assortment of irons in the slow fire of Chinese Government affairs, and to do a desultory business in ancient bronzes and pictures, it was rather because of his love of the game, with all its chances and adventures, than because of any craving for the profits of its occasional windfalls.

M'Quigg was on his own—a free-lance in the labyrinthine field of China's frenzied finance. Then, as now, the regular forces of those whose business it is to extract concessions or collect bad debts from the Peking Government might be divided into three classes. First, there are the permanent representatives of the big banks, authoritative personages who bide their time to emerge as gods from their stately machines and speak with pomp and circumstance, as the oracles of the mysterious

money market, with their respective Governments behind them. Then there are the local agents of firms and syndicates which have established themselves on a permanent footing in railway, mining, armaments, and other branches of Government business—disillusioned individuals, as a rule, with a practical working knowledge of ways that are dark, whose principal occupation consists in explaining to Boards of Directors at home why things are not always what they seem. Finally, there is the ever-sanguine, ever-changing band of merchant adventurers, aspirant advisers, loan-mongers, and would-be concessionaires, honest bagmen and *chevaliers d'industrie*, who spend their feverish days in pursuing elusive mandarins from one Yamen to another, and their nights in garrulous gatherings at the Wagons-lits and the Hôtel de Pékin. From all parts of the earth, as vultures gather to a carcass, they descend upon Peking, these harbingers of China's inevitably impending insolvency, and many that come for a week remain for a year, to learn the rudiments of Oriental subtlety. It is from the conversation of these polyglot privateers that the enterprising journalist, or the wandering playwright in search of local colour, gets the most realistic impression of things as they are in China, and the latest guides to navigation amongst the reefs and shoals of mandarin statecraft.

M'Quigg, strictly speaking, belonged to the privateer division, but his thorough knowledge of the language and the fact of his being a permanent resident, on terms of intimate familiarity with Chinese officials of every description, placed him in a class by himself. As a matter of fact, his knowledge of China, ancient and modern, was that of a widely travelled student and shrewd observer;

and many a minister in the toils of a diplomatic *impasse* did not disdain to call casually at the little grey house under the wall, to pick up information and hints of a kind inaccessible to the Chancelleries. M'Quigg had spent a decade of his earlier years in the Imperial Customs, and in that multifarious service had seen life in many a far-flung outpost of the Celestial Empire, from Korea to the frontiers of Tibet. Thereafter, on behalf of a firm bent on supplying enterprising Viceroys with waterworks, electric light, tramcars, rifles, and other mechanical aids to the West's conception of progress, he had travelled in leisurely fashion throughout the length and breadth of the land, leaving behind him a mushroom trail of exotic undertakings all foredoomed to perish speedily of misuse or neglect, but sowing for himself in many a provincial Yamēn seeds of goodwill, which in later years were destined to grow into plants more fruitful than most of those built upon mechanical inventions. After several years of this wandering life, he had settled down for a while at Tientsin, where, during the alarms and excursions of the war with Japan, and the subsequent scramble for spheres of interest and concessions, he had done a lucrative business as agent of one of the big shipbuilding and armaments firms, and incidentally made friends with the rising generation of semi-westernised mandarins then coming to the front under the patronage of Li Hung-chang. After the storm and stress of the Boxer rising, scenting from afar the impending struggle between Russia and Japan for possession of Manchuria, he had taken up his abode at Moukden. There, as a confidential adviser behind the scenes in the Viceroy's Yamēn, he had done his best to advise the Chinese how to put their

house in order and to take advantage of the strife on their borders. Driven from Moukden by the tide of battle, he had finally come to anchor in Peking, prepared to spend the rest of his days in the congenial atmosphere of the ever-alluring city. But even before the collapse of the Manchu dynasty, he had become thoroughly disillusioned as to the capacity of the Mandarinate, old or new, to organise the kind of Government that would enable China to cope with the new forces and dangers, undreamt of by the founders of the Celestial system. After the passing of the Empress Dowager, he realised that with that strong and supple hand had gone the last hope of building something in the nature of a stable structure upon the weather-worn foundations of the past, and that, for the lack of firm government at the capital, the country must inevitably pass once more through a cataclysm of chaos and civil war. As a serious student of Chinese history and sociology, he merely smiled when visionaries, missionaries, or Press-beguiled diplomats held forth on the domes and citadels of the ready-made Utopia which they professed to descry in the mirage of Young China's trackless desert of democracy. He had a hearty contempt for most of the modern breeds of politicians with their catchwords and cant, and he never hesitated to declare that the ambitions of the "Westernised" Chinese, if fulfilled, could only mean handing over the masses to the exploitation of a narrow oligarchy, quite incapable of rulership. Nevertheless, and in spite of all his disillusionments, he held fast to an abiding respect and affection for the Chinese people, and to an unbounded faith in their passive strength of conservatism and recuperative power.

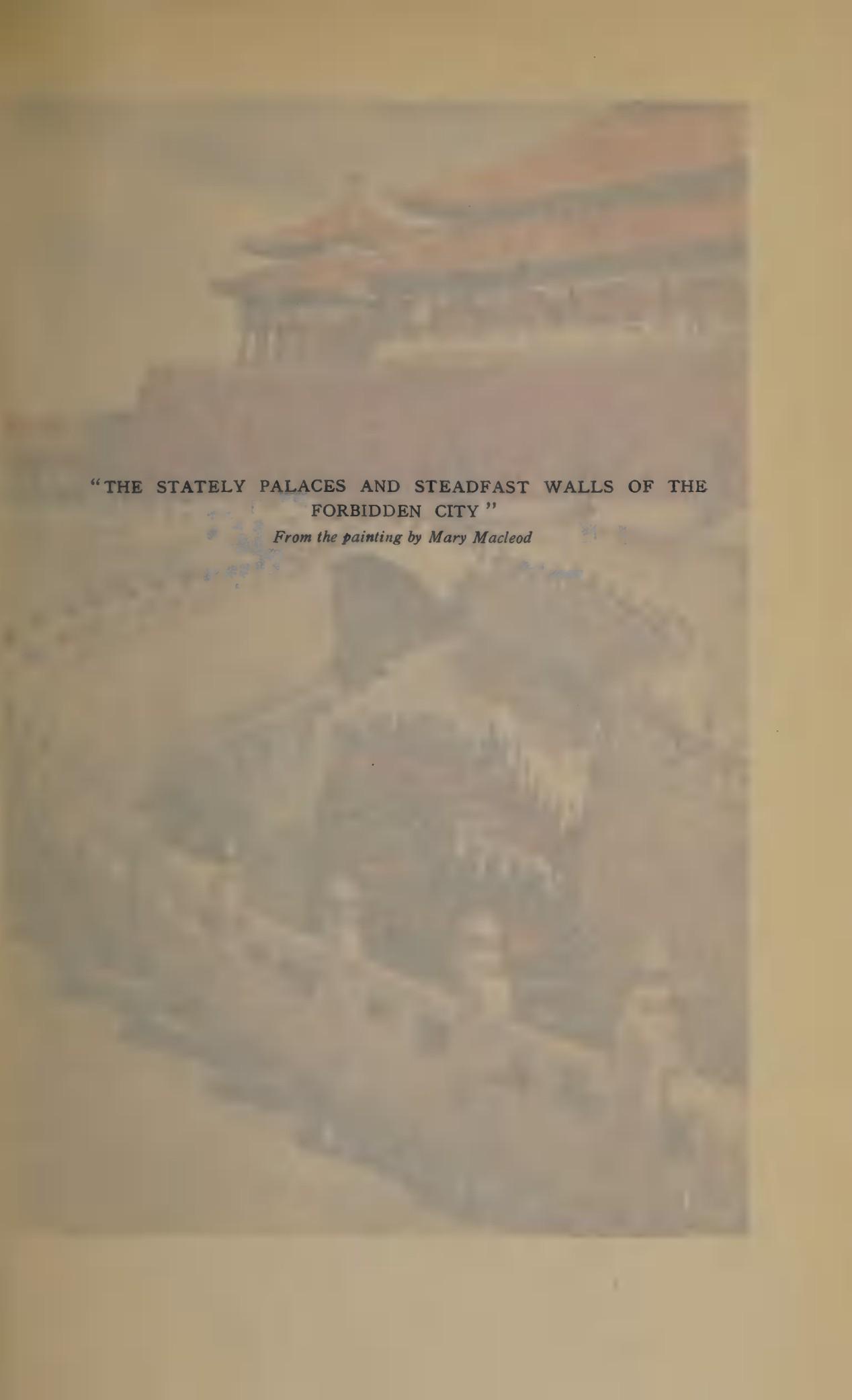
M'Quigg had three amiable weaknesses. The

first was an incurable propensity for Boer tobacco, disturbing to sensitive nostrils. The second was an indefatigable devotion to golf, the sort of die-hard persistence so often displayed by men who have taken to the game late in life, genial foozlers who struggle on, hoping against hope to go round in a hundred. North China is not exactly a golfer's paradise ; I believe that many of M'Quigg's business trips to Hongkong and Yokohama would never have been carried out but for the lure of fresh greens and bunkers new to mitigate the monotony of the sands and mud-flats of the Peking and Tientsin courses.

His third weakness was old Kuan, his house-boy, a stout old Chinese Bannerman, who had served him for over twenty years, and whose attitude towards his master combined all the qualities of a trusty watch-dog, a trained nurse, and an ever-ready Mentor. Kuan was a perfect specimen of the type of Chinese servant whose steady efficiency, unruffled serenity, and sterling faithfulness make life so pleasant and so easy for those who have the luck to win and retain their lifelong loyalty. It is a type, like that of the old-fashioned compradore, which seems threatened with extinction under the withering contact of the West, a type from whose simple virtues emanates an atmosphere of restfulness and dignity which we, the heirs of unquiet ages, have long since lost. In my recollections of M'Quigg, the figure of old Kuan lurks always close at hand, deft of hand and soft of foot, imperceptible yet courteous with the self-respecting courtesy of the East, a staunch and faithful creature, altogether lovable, who had followed his master's fortunes and protected his purse from the rapacity of wayside knaves on many a long trail.

As I chew the cud of memory and endeavour to recapture something of the subtle fragrance of life at Peking in those dreamy midsummer days and softly pulsating nights, I realise, as I never did at the time, how much of the enduring charm of those halcyon hours was due to the genial fellowship always to be found at the little grey house under the wall, to the comfortable thought of M'Quigg's delectable oasis of wide-ranging and companionable talk, as a refuge from the windy waste of Legation *canards* and local gossip. If only he had set down in writing something of the tale of his adventures and experiences, what a lamp of practical wisdom might he not have lighted, to guide the floundering feet of those who seek to solve by texts and theories the eternal problem of East and West ! But his contemplative philosophy was not of the kind which records itself in diaries or seeks a bubble reputation in the penny Press, so that nothing remains of all his garnered store of ripe knowledge but scanty gleanings, enshrined in the memories of a few kindred spirits now scattered to the ends of the earth. And with the years that the locusts have eaten, how far off and faint have those memories become, how difficult to recover the elusive atmosphere of those far-distant summer nights, when we sat among the oleanders and discussed the human comedy and all things under heaven, while the long-drawn cry and rattle of the night-watch rose like a vocal incense to the immemorial past, and the pale glimpses of the moon lingered softly upon the stately palaces and steadfast walls of the Forbidden City.

Of the wisdom and whimsical humour of M'Quigg, no words of mine, I fear, can give a life-like conception ; nevertheless, in relating, as I propose to do, one or two experiences and tales of



"THE STATELY PALACES AND STEADFAST WALLS OF THE  
FORBIDDEN CITY"

*From the painting by Mary Macleod*

As I threw the tea of mutton and vegetables  
in constant motion, like a madman, in the  
life in Peking in those three hundred days  
and half, you may imagine how I never did  
at the time have time to think. The charm of  
these hours has now passed away, and fellowship  
always in the same circle, though we are under  
the same roof, is now a thing of past. M'Quigg's  
death has taken away the last link in the chain of  
memories, and I have no more to do than to write

THE EPIGRAMS OF THE CHINESE PHILOSOPHER,  
“YIIO KSCQHKO.”

“I AM THE MIRROR OF MUD, TO GUIDE THE WANDERERS  
NOT OF THOSE WHO SEE, TO SOLVE BY TEXTS AND PHRASES  
THE ETERNAL PROBLEM (‘EAST AND WEST’). BUT HIS  
CONTEMPLATIVE PHILOSOPHY WAS NOT OF THE KIND WHICH  
RECDLS A CUP IN DISHES, OR SEEKS A BUBBLE REPUTATION  
IN THE PENNY PRESS, SO THAT, HAVING UNLEARNED OF ALL HIS  
GARNERED STORE OF RIPE KNOWLEDGE BUT MORTAL CLEAR-  
INGS, ENSHRINED IN THE MEMORIES OF A FEW KINDRED  
SPIRITS NOW SCATTERED TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH. AND  
WITH THE CARE THAT THE LOCUSTS HAVE EATEN, HOW FAR  
OFF AND FAINT HAVE THOSE MEMORIES GONE, HOW DIFFICULT  
TO RECOVER THE ELUSIVE THINGS LOST OF THOSE FIVE  
DISTANT SUMMER NIGHTS, WHEN WE SAT DURING THE  
OLEANDERS AND DISCUSSED THE BOSSU, QUADRUPEDS AND  
ALL THINGS UNDER HEAVEN, WHILE THE LONG DRUMMING  
AND RATTLE OF THE NIGHT-WATCH ROSE LIKE A VOCAL  
INCENSE TO THE IMMEMORIAL PASS, AND THE PALTRY  
GLIMPSES OF THE MOON LINGERED SADLY UPON THE STARRY  
PALACES AND STEADFAST WALLS OF THE FORGOTTEN CITY.”

Of the wisdom and whimsical humour of  
M'Quigg, no words of mine, I fear, can approach  
like conception; nevertheless, in  
propose to do, one or two experiences of his life





his telling, which remain fairly distinct amidst a mass of fading memories, I may be able to convey to the reader something of the spirit of the man, at the same time perhaps throwing a little light on the problem, ever old and ever new, which is China.

## II

## A GRACEFUL CONCESSION

ON the evening of a certain 14th of July, in a year the date whereof need not be specified (lest we tread perchance on supersensitive toes), Peter M'Quigg had dined with me at the Peking Wagons-lits, and thereafter we had made our leisurely way to the official reception, whereby His Excellency the French Minister was celebrating the birthday of the Republic with all the circumstance and ceremony available *in partibus infidelium*. Say what we will about the comparative futility of most of France's policies in the Far East and the unprofitable results of her colonial adventures, we must, at least, confess that, in the matter of achieving prestige by skilful display of all the outward and visible signs of pomp and power, she has nothing to learn and a good deal to teach. Her rulers have never failed to perceive the real value, from China to Peru, of "face," achieved by means of noble residences for their representatives and lavishness of ceremonial to the glory of the Tricolour.

On the present occasion Monsieur de Bougy, a mild, middle-aged individual, who had recently sought a respectable refuge in *la carrière* from the fretful fever of politics, had done his utmost, by hospitality of the princely kind, to compensate for an inevitable scarcity of guests and for his own inexperience in the gentle art of entertaining Orien-

tal dignitaries. The spacious and stately apartments of the French Legation were splendidly decked and garnished ; fairy-lamps and huge official lanterns shed their pale lights on the goodly pleasaunce of the garden ; and at a lordly buffet, loaded with every dainty and delicacy known to East and West, champagne flowed like water. Most of the Corps Diplomatique, as in duty bound, had come in from their *villégiature* at the hills or the sea to applaud their Doyen's well-worn platitudes and to drink (with such mental reservations as the political situation might require) to the glory of France and the health of her representative.

Chinese and Manchu officialdom had also for-gathered in force, eager as ever to gratify its insatiable curiosity in the matter of barbarian fleshpots and social etiquette. In flowing robes of gorgeous silks and rich brocades, embroidered with the insignia of their various ranks, they made the daintiest lilies in the diplomatic field look like poor relations, for these were days before the mandarin had been misled to sell his birthright of dignified raiment for a horrid mess of shoddy reach-me-downs. Panoplied in the ineffable serenity of the East, they sat or stood in little groups, affable yet undeniably aloof, meeting the requirements of the occasion with that fine flower of Oriental complacency in which only the initiated may detect a subtle flavour of condescension. Fortunately the official solemnities were brief : for both the Spanish Doyen of the Diplomatic Body and the Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs, on whom lay the burden of speech-making, were cheerful souls of a free-and-easy philosophy, less inclined to the pomposities than to the amenities of such occasions. The winds of diplomatic eloquence were therefore

tempered to a grateful audience, most of whom thereupon endeavoured to forget the oppression of the poultice-like sultry atmosphere by retreating from the *grand salon*, either to the garden or to the card-tables.

There was dancing, of course, to the erratic *tempo* of the I. G.'s band, commencing with a *quadrille d'honneur*, in which their various Excellencies set solemnly to their unmistakably bored partners, allotted to them in strict order of precedence, by protocols determined ; after which, the nimble polka and the alluring waltz were free for all those whose energies or gallantries rose superior to the burden and heat of the night. The dancing was confined to Europeans, for at the time of which I write the gilded youth of Young China, fresh from American Universities, had not yet begun to manifest their conception of progress and their contempt for their country's instinctive moralities, by encouraging their women-folk to turkey-trot and tango to the negroid cacophony of jazz. These were days when the deportment, as well as the dress, of China's élite tacitly claimed the respect which, as a rule, the restless materialism of the West instinctively yields to the intellectual and moral superiority of the East. On the present occasion, the formalities being concluded, most of the Chinese dignitaries forgathered to the neighbourhood of the buffet, and there proceeded to gratify the curiosity of the inner man, exchanging the while desultory urbanities with their hosts and wary confidences amongst themselves. Their attitude, despite its ineffable courtesy, impressed one as a manifestation of the philosophic detachment of the Superior Man, as defined by the Confucian classics. Their placid gaze seemed to be studying the curious ways of the

barbarian, and especially the dancing, with much the same sort of interest as they would display at a zoological garden, bearing always in mind the Master's persistent refusal to discuss monsters and feats of agility.

As M'Quigg never played cards, and the heat was so oppressive that the solace of a smoke seemed infinitely preferable to polite small talk, we ensconced ourselves with cool drinks in a little ante-room, from which we could contemplate in comparative comfort the rapidly wilting energies and collars of the dancers, and beyond them the kaleidoscopic effect of little groups of gorgeously arrayed Orientals, moving around and about the buffet in a patient but apparently absent-minded quest of gastronomic surprises. From this, our quiet coign of vantage, we gazed for an hour or more upon a moving picture full of incident and humour even for the initiated, in the background of which, for those that had eyes to see, the writing stood clear upon the wall, bearing its message of the White Peril and its imminent menace to the world's oldest and wisest civilisation. Here, before our eyes, was a picturesque puppet-show, a gay interlude of the tragic comedy of East and West, in which not only the clash of atoms, but of systems, might be discerned behind the automatic courtesies of highly-polished *fantoccini*. After a prolonged "session of sweet silent thought," I suggested something of the kind to M'Quigg, who had been observing the scene with the contemplative eye of a well-fed ruminant.

"Yes," he said, "you are right. All this is a fair sample of the new wine which is going to burst a lot of good old bottles. But when you come down to bedrock in this clash of systems, there's nothing

in it, of course, but elementary economics and a new phase of the eternal struggle for survival. No doubt our inveterate capacity for self-deception will always enable us to justify the extermination or expropriation of our yellow and black and brown brothers in the sacred name of 'progress' and Christianity ; but all the same, one can't help wondering whether it ever seems to occur to any of our oracles or orators that the world would certainly not be any easier or pleasanter to live in if the Chinese, as a race, were ready and able to follow our uplifters' advice. And why, I wonder, do none of our philosophers ever recall the fact that the West owes most of its wisdom, and all of its religion, to the East ? All our attempts to persuade the Chinese to abandon their own rational civilisation in favour of our accursed industrialism, to adopt our scientific man-killing machinery and our distorted version of an Asiatic creed, are simply an impertinence and a tyrannous abuse of force. If I had my way . . . "

As he warmed to his subject his voice took on an expostulatory crescendo, and I was therefore not surprised when Roper of the German Bank, that earnest gleaner of Legation rumours and club gossip, strolled casually in and helped himself with calculated nonchalance to a cigar. Peter thereupon came swiftly down from his high horse of eloquence, and proceeded to exchange with the intruder sundry desultory inanities suitable to the occasion.

As they talked, I endeavoured to review in my mind the events of the last few hours, and to discover therein some explanation for M'Quigg's sudden lapse into rhetoric. For this was a rare complaint with him, and generally traceable, I had noticed, to some local and transient irritant. What

was it? Perhaps the electricity in the air, heavy beneath the storm-clouds now gathering towards the city from the western hills. Or possibly the unedifying spectacle presented by Mrs. Knapper of the Customs—fat, fair, and forty—as she waltzed with her latest captive from the students' mess, languorously revolving in a four-foot circle under the central chandelier, a spectacle to which a group of elderly mandarins were devoting their very serious and silent attention. But I was inclined rather to ascribe it to an incident which had occurred at the buffet, just as the leading Red Buttons and other high dignitaries were beginning to exchange valedictory glances and giving rapid orders *sotto voce* for their carts and chairs. A gay young spark named Weng, recently appointed to a junior post in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, had seized the opportunity of this moving moment to help himself at the buffet to a copious selection of sweetmeats, which, following the ancient native custom, he then proceeded to stow away in his capacious sleeves. For so doing he was loudly and sternly rebuked by old Li Tai, the ancient and indispensable Cantonese "No. 1" of the French Legation, who had no mind to let his own lawful perquisites be diminished by any such flagrant violation of the code of etiquette observable at foreign feasts. Young Weng stood thus in peril of grievous loss of face. But in the nick of time M'Quigg, who had been on cordial terms with his illustrious father, came swiftly to the rescue, and engaging the embarrassed youth in casual conversation, led him tactfully beyond the range of Li Tai's rumbling comments on the degeneration of *tajens*. Personally, I thought the little incident rather delightful, because it confirmed in a striking manner my favourite adage of

"Cœlum non animum mutant," and revealed the triumphant force of atavistic instincts over the surface polish of Western learning. For young Weng had been educated in England, and was given to holding forth, in drawing-rooms and missionary meetings, on the democratic ideals by virtue of which Young China was shortly going to astonish the world ; he was, in fact, one of the first "returned students" in office to perceive that, for himself and his friends, the shortest road to power lay in adapting to their purposes the cant of catchwords where-with the professional idealists of the West are wont to delude themselves and "the stupid people." Yet for all that, when confronted by this lavish display of free food, all the pretty little tricks and shibboleths acquired at Oxford were obliterated in the instinctive response to an acquisitive impulse as old as the race-mind itself, as insistent as its transmitted memories of the haunting spectre of famine.

It was just the sort of incident to encroach upon M'Quigg's cherished reserves of optimism, and therefore (he being Irish) to account for his sudden outburst of eloquence in defence of the East against the West. Nevertheless, in that outburst, and in the meditative silence into which he lapsed when it occurred to our German friend to remember that he had business elsewhere, I seemed to perceive indications of a more personal factor in the case. The dovecots of his philosophy were evidently fluttered, but something in his manner suggested a subdued excitement over and above his vicarious concern for the tribulations of the Chinese. Had we not been at the height of the dog days, the close season for official business, I should have attributed this wavelet on the tranquil pool of his mind to some unex-

pected development, some sudden *coup* in one of his several fields of "pidgin." But I knew that the Minister of Evasions was entertaining a select company of lotus-eaters at the pool of the Dragon Prince, and that the Minister of Machinations was of that convivial company. I gave up guessing, and resorted to direct action.

"Peter," I said, "I have noticed that whenever the spirit moves you to denounce the wickedness of the West, there is usually a specific instance in the back of your mind. What is it this time?"

"It's never very difficult to find one, is it? There's you, for example; and there's meself . . ."

"What have you been up to now?" I asked. "Been taking advantage, I suppose, of the necessities and calamities of the poor Chinese again?"

"Well, since you mention it, I have; and what's more, I'm not sure that I'm not a bit ashamed of myself."

"I thought as much. But I didn't know there had been any business doing lately?"

"As a matter of fact," he replied, "I wasn't looking for it. This thing just happened: one more illustration of the ancient truth that everything comes to him who knows how to wait."

Just then the band struck up an oleaginous waltz, and three couples, the last surviving diehards of the dance, took the floor. Mrs. Knapper, somewhat dishevelled but still in the ring, was one of the ladies; another was Mrs. Singer of the American Legation Guard; and the third was little Mrs. Wang, the young and pretty bride of Mr. Harry Chuck Wang, late of Cambridge and Lincoln's Inn, and now an "expectant" official, new style. In this latter capacity young Wang would not have been anything very remarkable; but as the

*bona fide* husband of an undeniably white woman, and as the eldest son of old Wang Shao-li, ex-Viceroy and head of the Board of Revenue, he was an object of considerable interest to Peking society.

"It's a funny world," continued M'Quigg, gazing thoughtfully at his cigar and then at the dancers. "Do you see the young woman over yonder, dancing with Captain Williams, the language-leave man?"

"Mrs. Wang, you mean. What about her?"

"Well, that little stroke of business we were just talking about. She did it for me."

"Why, I didn't know you had even met her?"

"I haven't, but it's the truth I'm telling you all the same. It's a longish yarn, and this isn't the place to spin it anyway—too many screens about. Come along round to my den. Old Kuan will find us a drop of something really cold, and I'll tell you all about it."

So we made our way out through a crowd of *ting-ch'ai* and lantern-bearers, out into the Chiao-Min-Hsiang, where a long line of mule-carts and green sedan-chairs stretched on both sides of the road as far as the German Legation. The thunder-storm had burst in the western hills, and with it the heaviness of the night had passed. As we entered M'Quigg's courtyard, a little breeze, fragrant of gardenia, was whispering to the little grey house a message from the far Siberian plains. And almost before we had settled in our cool cane chairs, old Kuan was there in his long blue robe, with iced Tansan and all things needful, magically ready as usual. As a song without words he performed the customary rites; not till all had been deftly done and our pipes lighted did he break the silence to inform M'Quigg that an official letter had come

from the Ministry of Machinations. Did the *tajen* want to read it now, or should it wait till the morning?

"Let it wait," said M'Quigg. "I know what is in it. And now, Kuan, you go to bed; we shan't want anything more." Thereupon the long blue robe faded softly into the surrounding shadows.

"That letter," said M'Quigg, "contains the formal promise of the Ministry to compensate the Heilung Copper Mine Syndicate for their surveys and expenses on the original concession, which, as you may remember, the Hunan gentry wouldn't let them work. It isn't much, of course, but as the company is on its last legs, the shareholders ought to be glad to save something from the wreck."

"Why, Peter, I thought you had given up that egg, as hopelessly addled, long ago? How long is it since old Whitfield and his engineers chucked up their waiting game at the Wagons-lits?"

"Nearly three years. It was a game they couldn't afford, you see, as I can. A dogged fellow, old Whitfield; he certainly stuck it much longer than most of the gay pioneers who come out all cock-a-hoop, to polish off their business in a month, and find themselves a year later still hanging about the Chancery waiting for the contract that never comes. He stood it for two summers, spending the idlest days of his life in buying curios and playing billiards, and sending the Waiwupu a monthly note of his expenses, just to remind them of his existence. But when the bored and bilious bureaucrat in charge of the Chancery finally advised him to go and negotiate with the provincial gentry, he folded his tent like the Arab, and before fading away passed his bill of costs and the salvage operations over to me."

"Yes, I knew that ; and I knew you had done a bit of negotiating on the subject when old Liang was at the Ministry. But didn't you tell me that the Legation had practically written it off the slate ? And where does Mrs. Wang come in, anyway ? "

"We'll come to her in a moment," said M'Quigg. "About the Legation, you're quite right. When old Whitfield chucked up the sponge, they heaved a sigh of relief and stowed away his dossier, all neatly docketed, in the *Sleeping Dogs* file, where, as far as they are concerned, it might have lain till Domesday, or the next big clean-up."

"And yet what a flourish of trumpets they put up when the concession was first signed ! Didn't Earl Screwe describe it in the House of Lords as a notable triumph for British diplomacy, and an indication of the Government's earnest intention to develop England's sphere of influence in the Yangtze Valley ? "

"Yes, and Sir William Wabbell got his G.C.M.G. merely for forwarding a copy of old Whitfield's contract to the F.O. for inclusion with other evidence of official activity in a fat Blue Book. But times have changed since then ; the gentlemen who now give orders in Downing Street attach more importance to the cult of the parish pump than to British prestige overseas. The great principles of British Liberalism . . ."

"Steady, old man ! You'll be getting on to cosmopolitan finance next, and then, good-bye to Mrs. Wang. Let's get back to old Whitfield. Couldn't he have kicked up a row in Parliament or the Press, and laid a claim to compensation ? "

"Oh, there's never been any question either at the F.O. or the Legation as to his lawful claims. Unfortunately the Waiwupu have learned that a

claim may be lawful and yet lapse. Mind you, if it had been 'the Muckle Hoose,' or any of the Big Tin Gods of the China Association, with their speaking-tubes in the House of Commons, I don't say that the Legation wouldn't have been told to roar like any sucking dove ; but it would have made no difference as far as the Chinese are concerned. They know that there wouldn't be another naval demonstration at Taku if they pulled Sir William's nose on the King's birthday. Since we took to feeding the British lion on cocoa and Lionel Curtis, that noble beast has no terrors for the Chinese Dragon."

"Avast heaving, mate ! What was the amount of old Whitfield's bill when he cast off the dust of Peking ?"

"The bill doesn't matter. I told him that, things being as they were, he'd be lucky to get back his out-of-pocket expenses, including *douceurs* paid to certain worthies of the Ministry, and he agreed. Also, I told him it was all a matter of time and tact, with a bit of luck thrown in. Sooner or later in Chinese affairs, if you can afford to wait, the right moment comes, and things straighten themselves out, for no apparent reason."

"You've certainly done your share of waiting over this job."

"It wasn't all waste of time, and, to tell the truth, I've enjoyed it. Old Liang and I have always been good friends, you know, out of business hours. He's very wise about old paintings and Ming pottery, and has put me up to many a good thing ; and I've done my bit in getting him rubbings of ancient Egyptian and Assyrian inscriptions. Also, we've had many a pleasant evening together at poker with old Tang and Tsai, and Lebedeff of

the Russian Consulate. So that, although for three years he has kept me talking the same dreary twaddle about the provincial gentry and their sovereign rights, trying to wear me out by letting me grill in the stuffiest hole of his Yamén in summer, and freeze in his stone-paved library in winter, it was all part of a game which we both understood, and no tempers lost. Of course I began big and gradually came down ; but all the time I had a feeling that the old bird would come off his perch and behave decently so soon as he saw a favourable opening. They have their own troubles, you know."

" But as old Liang is out at the hills, entertaining his oiled and curled Assyrian bulls, I don't quite see . . . "

" You will in a moment. When I said good-bye to him just before he left a fortnight ago, old Whitfield's claim was in promising shape. It looked as if the Hunanese so-called leaders could be brought or bought to agree to the repayment of his expenses, incurred in all good faith. There was, as usual, one alleged patriot, head of the Changsha gentry, needier or greedier than the rest, who threatened trouble, and who had to be frightened or squared. Now, I don't know whether you are aware that Mrs. Wang's father-in-law, old Wang Shao-li of the Board of Revenue, happens to be a Hunanese, and a Changsha man at that ? "

" Yes ; but I also know that he isn't very sweet on your friend Liang, or any of the Cantonese crowd, so I still don't see . . . "

" That's so ; if it hadn't been for the providential appearance of Mrs. Wang, junior, upon the scene, I don't know that I could ever have persuaded the old man to speak the word in season which has

stilled the last whispers of discord at Changsha. And here we come to the story of Mrs. Harry Chuck Wang, *née* Bertha Bullwell, of Bloomsbury."

It was a simple little story as M'Quigg proceeded to tell it, but this particularly pernicious result of educating Young China abroad had never before been manifested so prominently, or brought home so clearly to those in authority, and those in doubt, at Peking. Even now it may serve to illustrate the old maxim about East and West, and to point a moral which should be useful to all but forlorn-hope spinsters and professional "uplifting" internationalists.

Young Wang, it seems, had met his Bertha, the disillusioned daughter of a Bloomsbury landlady, one night of moonlight and music and swift-moving madness at Earl's Court. It was spring-time, he was young, and China was a dim and distant memory. The rest had happened with such amazing rapidity that only after a visit to a Registrar's office and a wedding breakfast at the Holborn Restaurant did he awake to the reality of his married state, in a world that was pleasant enough for the moment, but bristling with complications for the future. As to Bertha, who had never aspired higher than a bank clerk, she awoke from his whirlwind wooing to find herself the slightly dazed, but on the whole delighted, Desdemona of an Othello who, at all events, was evidently well provided with this world's goods. For her delectation Harry subsequently drew a number of pleasing but slightly fanciful pictures of the proud position which she would fill as his wife in the gay and fashionable world of Peking, and Bertha rose to the heights of her new position with all the nimble adaptability of her class. Young Wang, very much enamoured

and very proud of having achieved the distinction of an English wife, perceived nevertheless on the horizon of his wedded bliss the cloud, considerably larger than a man's hand, of ancestral prejudices and domestic difficulties. To his father he broke the news in a letter, wherein deep-rooted instincts of filial piety struggled pathetically with the results of six years' exile among the outer barbarians. He described his bride as a virtuous maiden of noble birth, eager for the privilege of knowing her husband's parents and of bearing sons worthy to perform the accustomed rites before the tablets of his august ancestors. Old Wang's reply contained some appropriate maxims concerning the blessedness of marriage and paternity, together with certain classical allusions to the risks of hasty and independent action in such matters. It also enclosed a substantial remittance and a request that young Wang (now a full-fledged barrister) should return home without delay, so that his wife might prostrate herself reverently before her mother-in-law. Harry told Bertha about the cheque, and helped her to buy gowns of the kind calculated to attract the notice of Legation Street, but he postponed the subject of mother-in-law to a more convenient season.

The rest of Bertha's history has often repeated itself since those days. But as M'Quigg told it (and he got it from young Wang direct), it was not without certain unusual and pathetic features. As his father's son, Harry Chuck Wang soon learned in Peking that the path of the reformer is hard, and the rôle of the ardent idol-breaker much easier in London than in China. Also, he soon discovered himself as a sorely battered buffer state between East and West, as represented by his mother and

his wife. On closer acquaintance with the ceremonies and customs of Chinese domesticity, and especially with the sacred privileges of a mother-in-law, Bertha hastened to insist upon a separate *ménage* and upon a definite declaration of her lord's monogamous intentions. Furthermore, she insisted upon her right, and Harry's duty, to mix freely in the cosmopolitan society of the capital. In a word, Bertha hoisted the standard of independence, and proclaimed the doctrine of woman's rights, as recognised by the élite of Bloomsbury ; and Harry found himself therefore between the deep sea of his boyish infatuation for his wife, and the devil of a situation which threatened to inflict grievous loss of face upon his parents.

Had the situation occurred at Chengtu, Soochow, or any provincial city, it would certainly and speedily have ended, either in the white woman's complete submission to the Oriental code, or her swift return, as damaged goods, to her native land. As young Wang confessed, when by his father's order he came to ask M'Quigg's advice, it was the latter solution which his mother had indignantly demanded, when some busybody or other told her that her daughter-in-law refused to wear Chinese clothes and frequently danced in public, after the shameless custom of foreigners, "posturing to the sound of horns with strange men." But old Wang, much as he abhorred these violations of ancestral propriety, and regretted his son's unorthodox marriage, was wise enough to perceive that, with all the diplomatic world and his wife looking on, an open quarrel would mean a public scandal, in which foreigners might easily intervene. There was less face to be lost by temporising and compelling oneself to smile the smile of polite acquiescence.

But the situation was too uncomfortable to last long. Bertha found it so, no doubt, for when most of the Legation world had left for the hills at the beginning of the hot weather, she had given the Wang family furiously to think by starting a very conspicuous flirtation with Captain Williams, the Indian language-leave officer. According to M'Quigg, she did this deliberately, in order to force a solution ; if so, she succeeded. For at this stage old Wang, goaded by the taunts of the "mean one of his inner chamber," and by much irritating advice from philosophic comforters, stepped nimbly into the arena. He came to see M'Quigg, like Nicodemus, by night, and as the result of that confidential interview, two matters were speedily arranged. One, that to the Hunanese gentry would be spoken the wingèd words which would enable the Ministry of Machinations to settle Whitfield's claims without further parley ; two, that M'Quigg should ask Maxmores, the eminent shipbuilders, to take on young Wang for three years in a sort of semi-official "larn-pidgin" capacity, at their Tyneside works. Now, M'Quigg had no misgivings as to the outcome of this request, for Maxmores had recently been actively advocating the technical training of young Chinese at the fountain-heads of British industry, and their carefully nourished hopes of selling a battleship to the Chinese Government could not fail to be stimulated by a scion of the Board of Revenue on their pay-sheet.

"Yes, I've promised old Wang that they'll take him on all right," said M'Quigg, "and quite a lot of things can happen in three years. One thing you may safely bet on, and that is, that the fair Bertha will never see Peking or her Chinese mother-in-law again."

"It's equally safe, I suppose, to bet that Mr. Harry Chuck Wang will revert in due course to type and to the patriarchal ideas of filial and marital relationships, so that when he hears the East a-callin', after three years of Tyneside with a disillusioned Bertha, that young woman will not be included in the call. As to the end of the story . . ."

"*Tout s'arrange,*" observed M'Quigg. "Meanwhile, my friend, observe that it's an ill wind that blows nobody good. Had it not been for that young woman's romantic misconception of the gorgeous East, the shareholders of the Heilung Copper Mine Co. would never have got the comfortable tidings which the *Times* will give them, when the energetic Morton has telegraphed the news."

"I saw him at the dance to-night. Did you tell him anything?" I asked.

"My dear fellow," he replied, "why should I? What is the Chancery there for? No; to-morrow morning I shall report the agreement to the Minister and hand him a copy in due course for the archives. Then, when Morton next drops in, he will get the dope from the proper official sources, and duly report it as another striking success for British diplomacy in the Far East."

The night was far spent, and from the American Legation the sound of the watchman's rattle came faintly, as if weary of well-doing. M'Quigg saw me out to the street, where a rag-picker, first prowler of the dawn, was already at his grimy job.

"Farewell, you wily old bird," I said. "You've done a good day's work, and let's hope all concerned will be duly grateful."

"Who wants gratitude?" he replied. "As

a matter of fact, the shareholders, and the China Association, and all the rest of them will very naturally give whatever credit there may be to the Foreign Office and its ever-watchful agents. The Chinese, no doubt, will give most of the credit to me ; and they will all be wrong. For, as I have made it plain to you, if Whitfield's friends get their money back, they owe it entirely to the fact that Harry Chuck Wang took unto himself a wife from among the daughters of the Philistines. And the moral of that is, retribution awaits those who despise the wisdom of their forefathers."

As I walked homewards, the first faint glimmerings of dawn, the rosy-fingered, had begun to play softly on the carved roof of the Hatamen tower, and towards the east the stars were palely dying. And as I thought of the long-tested wisdom of this people, which has brought them safely through so many perils of change, it seemed to me that some retribution should also, and most justly, fall upon those of us whose business or pleasure it is to teach the Chinese to despise their goodly heritage.

### III

## A MONSTER OF THE PRIME

IN that "port after stormy seas," which he had made in the little house under the walls of Peking, M'Quigg's life had gradually settled down to a leisurely routine of work and play which, while varying with the seasons, fairly represented his work-a-day philosophy and the survival of the fittest of his tastes and habits. Thus, on Sundays, it was his invariable custom, weather permitting, to ride out by the Anting Men and play a morning round of golf on the so-called links of the sandy waste which lies between the north wall of the city and the Yellow Temple. At his Sunday tiffin (at which marrow-bones and waffles were standing dishes) there was never more than one guest, and that one a connoisseur of some branch of China's ancient arts and crafts. After lunch, the numerous curio-dealers of his acquaintance would be ushered in, one after the other, and their choicest wares displayed, in the library if the weather were cold, or on the flagstones of the courtyard in summer. Only the elect of the curio trade were admitted by old Kuan to these Sunday afternoon *symposia*, and they always brought something worth seeing—a class of goods very different to those produced from the blue-cloth bundles of the hawkers who prey upon globe-trotters and griffins and diplomats freshly bitten with the col-

lecting mania. For in the little world of Peking which lives for and by *objets de virtu*, M'Quigg was known not only as the possessor of "an eye," but as one well versed in the technique as well as most of the tricks of the trade.

One steamy afternoon in the autumn of 1907, having had our usual round of golf before tiffin, I was enjoying the grateful shade of his mat awning and tranquilly digesting old Kuan's incomparable waffles with the help of some excellent coffee and a cigar, while at the other side of the courtyard M'Quigg was examining a piece of Korean porcelain which a dealer assured him was genuine Sung, and just the thing for Mr. Pierpont Morgan's collection. Since the Boxer upheaval in 1900, when all the best curio-dealers' stocks were pilaged, and most of the city's famous private collections looted or dispersed, M'Quigg had given up dealing in black hawthorns and peachblow, and had devoted his attention to things less fashionable perhaps at Christie's, but just as interesting to the scholarly connoisseur of Chinese art, curios for which the market was generally confined to half a dozen buyers. Tang dynasty scrolls and paintings, Sung pottery, ancient bronzes, ivories and jades—these were usually the things which after much long-winded exposition, the dealers unwrapped with delicately careful fingers to tempt his fancy on Sunday afternoons. There was no unseemly eagerness or haste to conclude a bargain on either side. I have known the same man bring the same thing at intervals for a year or more, or leave it on approval for months ; and always their talk was as between one adept and another, imbued with the freemasonry of a common cult. Those days, alas ! when buying and selling partook of

the poetic art of conversation, are gone for ever, with the passing of the throne and the disappearance of the Manchu nobility ; he who would secure genuine Chinese antiques to-day will find them more readily, and buy them more cheaply, in London and Paris than in Peking—a fact of which the Japanese, be it noted, are well aware.

There must have been a drowsiness that afternoon either in the air or in the aftermath of Kuan's waffles, for as I sat and listened to Pang, the Soochow *hutung* dealer, telling M'Quigg of the fabulous prices which Freer of Detroit had lately paid for Sung ware, the soft steady droning of their friendly argument grew fainter and fainter in a dreamy distance. I may possibly have had forty winks, when a light touch on my shoulder brought me back to actualities ; drowsily I heard Kuan's gently deprecating voice announcing that old Liu from the Chien Men shop, whose sign is "The Faithful Phœnix," had brought some enamels which he thought I might like to see. In those days I went in for collecting in a desultory way, chiefly for the fun of the thing, and because talking to the older curio men, once you got to know them, was generally a liberal education ; also, I had a *penchant* for Chien Lung enamels with European designs, because there dwells in these things a vague and fragrant flavour of romance, a dramatic quality as of history made manifest, a charm similar to that which in earlier days still lingered amidst the deserted ruins of the Imperial pleasures of Yuen-Ming-Yuen, or in those astrolabes which tell in bronze the stirring story of the Jesuit fathers, the grand old spiritual *conquistadores* of Far Cathay. So I came up out of the land of Nod, and Liu showed me his treasures—a pair of vases, upon

whose dainty panels Strephon, in a tricorne hat, was wooing Phyllis *à la Watteau*, through various stages of a landscape, wherein Italian renaissance architecture struggled to adapt itself to Chinese ideas of perspective. They were certainly very pretty specimens, and Liu knew that his line was well baited ; we talked about them and about other things for quite a long time, in the dilettante manner appropriate to such occasions.

Liu had departed at last, after agreeing to leave the vases at my house for further consideration, and the Sunday levee being at an end, old Kuan was busy preparing the daintiest of tea-tables among the oleanders. M'Quigg, puffing away at a corncob charged with villainous Boer tobacco, had not spoken a word since Pang had gone his chastened way—he was absorbed in meditation of a depth which suggested some cause weightier than Korean pottery. It was some minutes after Kuan had announced that tea was ready that he stuffed his pipe in his pocket and joined me, still thinking hard. I went on with the buttered scones, knowing better than to try to draw him before he had chewed his cud of cogitation, and in due season he spoke.

“That fellow Pang gave me a rather interesting bit of news,” he said. “He’s a Shantung man, as I dare say you know, and in the course of his rounds he gets to hear of most things where Shantung men are concerned. Well, yesterday the gardener at the Japanese Legation, a cousin of his, told him that a certain fellow-provincial of theirs named Chang, formerly house coolie at the Legation, had just turned up, more dead than alive, from a devil of a journey in the wilds of Manchuria : moreover, that on this journey he had been a sort

of general factotum for a mutual friend of ours, who has also returned, and is now laid up, a pretty sick man, in Yamamoto's quarters. You can guess his name, of course?"

" You don't mean the stormy petrel, Mihara? "

" You've got it in one. Our esteemed friend Mihara it is. And if all that the worthy Chang tells his pal the gardener about this journey is true, that same gallant officer, Major Mihara, should be in a fair way to promotion. Do you happen to know when he started on this particular trek? "

" Yes," I said ; " it was early in March. I remember his telling me he wanted to get to Sansing before the rivers opened, and to get in a bit of exploration work before the mosquito season."

" Well, he seems to have got even more hours of crowded life out of these six months than he used to get in the old days when he worked for the Rising Sun at Moukden and Kuan Cheng-tzū. And things have never been what you'd call really dull with him since 1900, have they? "

As M'Quigg spoke, there flashed across my mind the memory of a scene in which the man of whom we were talking had played a part very typical of the kind of work which the vanguard of Japan's military intelligence had to do, and did with such success, during the years in which Dai Nippon was quietly preparing to oust Russia from Manchuria. It was a scene of which I had been a privileged and much edified spectator, laid in the officers' mess of a certain Russian regiment quartered at Kuan Cheng-tzū in the autumn of 1903. I can see it now—the ramshackle barn of a billiard-room with its moth-eaten old table, a

tawdry *ikon* in the corner over the stove, and on the mildewed walls the inevitable gilt-framed portraits of Tzarina and Tzar. I can recall its suffocating atmosphere, compounded of vodka, beer, and cigarette ends, and its chaotic clamour of fierce argument and foolish song, which increased *crescendo* into the small hours. They were mostly young and all insufferably bored, these servants of the Great White Tzar ; and having found Mihara ready to join them in their cup of wine and cheerful singing in the wilderness, they welcomed him, all politics notwithstanding, with open arms. I remember that my first introduction to the mess was in the company of their Colonel, at whose quarters I had dined and played piquet. It was close on midnight when he suggested that I should make the acquaintance of his officers and drink with them their favourite toast to the realisation of Mouravieff's dream, "the Russian Empire of the East to be." The weather was warm for the time of year, and the mess windows being open, the night was filled with music, of a sort, to a considerable distance. As we entered the billiard-room the whole strength of the company—a dozen or more—were engaged in a muzzily solemn rendering of the "Marseillaise," led by a red-faced subaltern beating time with the butt-end of a cue. On the side of the room opposite to us was a broken-down settee, in the middle of which, with a maudlin expression on his face and an arm round the neck of a stalwart Russian on either side, sat he whom in later years we came to know as Major Mihara, one of Japan's more or less military attachés at Peking. But in this Kuan Cheng-tzü period of his career, he was pleased to be known as Mr. Yoshida, an earnest student of the Chinese classics, who, as

the Colonel informed me, earned a modest livelihood by teaching English in the homes of progressive Manchurian mandarins.

On the present occasion he was apparently most gloriously drunk, for when the Colonel introduced us to each other, he tried to stand up and failed ; nevertheless it seemed to me that, behind the screen of that maudlin expression, his eyes and ears were working usefully enough, and that my arrival upon the scene had produced upon him a rapidly sobering effect. After a while he contrived to get away from his fellow-revellers, and to manœuvre himself into a seat alongside of mine. I soon perceived that his English was quite good enough to justify him in giving lessons to young China ; moreover, that he had certainly not acquired it in Japan, but in God's own country. He was very concerned as to the object of my visit to this part of Manchuria, admitting that he knew me by sight, having seen me at Peking in 1901. Did I remember him ? No doubt he was relieved when I confessed that he had the advantage of me. When the party finally broke up between two and three o'clock, he volunteered to see me safely back to my native inn, and on the way he told me certain things which he probably preferred that I should learn in confidence from himself (not forgetting several allusions to the Anglo-Japanese Alliance) than from his Russian friends. Thus I learnt that he had been in these parts for nearly two years, that he was giving the Colonel lessons in Japanese in return for lessons in Russian, and that during his holidays he did a good deal of quiet travelling farther north. It was a lonely life among strangers, he said, and the late hours and drink which were necessary to the cultivation of good relations with

the Russians had completely ruined his digestion. "I have sacrificed my stomach for my country," was the way he put it ; and when I asked him how he could do good work under conditions such as those with which I had seen him contending that evening, his reply was equally eloquent of the indomitable spirit which gave Japan the victory over her powerful foe. "I have trained myself," he said, "with much trouble, so that even when I am drunk with my stomach and drunk with my legs, I am never drunk with my head." A very remarkable man was that quiet Mr. Yoshida, teacher of languages, whom many a war correspondent had reason to remember a year later as Major Mihara of the General Staff, and who, as military attaché in China after the Peace of Portsmouth, had fully earned the distinction of being known to the diplomatic world as "the stormy petrel." In those days opinions at Peking were divided as to whether Japan would have to fight Russia again for her place in the sun, or whether the two nations would agree—as they eventually did—to exploit China's northern dependencies between them and talk no more about the "Open Door." But all were agreed that, whatever might be the direction of Dai Nippon's future policy, the Intelligence work which Mihara had done, and was doing, would never be wasted.

And now the stormy petrel was back from the latest of his flights, and if M'Quigg's information was correct, it had been unhealthy but eventful.

"Did Pang give you any further details ?" I asked.

"Judging by what he told me," said M'Quigg, "I should say that his coolie friend had been pretty badly scared on this journey, and was talking a bit

wild. I gather that Mihara's beat lay beyond Kirin, in the Fish-skins' country, somewhere in the unknown region of everlasting swamps and voracious mosquitoes where the Sungari and the Amur rivers meet. Or it may have been farther south, towards Lake Hinka, in the vast marshes between the Lefu and the Ussuri. But wherever it was, he seems to have had a pretty bad time of it. They started from Kirin a party of six—two Japanese with four Chinese servants, all mounted,—and only these two have come back. All their ponies died of sheer exhaustion, stung to death by mosquitoes, gadflies, and wasps."

"It sounds," I said, "very like the story of the journeying of Fathers De la Brunière and Venault, as told by James in '*The Long White Mountain*.' You recollect how De la Brunière was finally slain by Fish-skins or Gilyaks, after wandering hopelessly in a country which he described as the abomination of desolation? I remember a description of vast impenetrable morasses on the right bank of the Sungari and of a narrow road by which the ginseng traders make their way to the Ussuri and Lake Hinka. That was somewhere about 1850, and, so far as I know, there haven't been any attempts since then at exploring a region whose only products seem to be murderers and mud."

"Well, Mihara's been there anyway," said M'Quigg, "and you can safely bet that, with or without Russia, he and his friends will make it their business to find out all that's worth knowing about the No Man's Land between Kirin and the Primorsk. And some day, my friend, thanks to Mihara and his successors, this very wilderness will blossom like the rose. What we have done for the Soudan,

Dai Nippon will do for that land of many waters, simply because she's got to find an outlet for her surplus population, and new sources of raw material for her industries."

"But what makes you think he ought to get promotion as the result of this particular journey?"

"I said I thought so, if all that his factotum says is true, because in that event his name should be inscribed on the honourable list of explorers who have rendered notable service to science. It may be, of course, that the authorities of Tokyo will decide as a matter of policy not to publish anything about his journey and to keep it for home consumption, but in any case he has wrecked his health for some years to come, and deserves some reward."

"And what are the impressive points of the faithful factotum's story?"

"It's a long yarn," said M'Quigg, "and has probably gathered a good deal of extraneous matter in passing from the coolie to the gardener and from the gardener to my friend Pang. It includes a grim account of hardships endured before these two survivors of the expedition fell in with a fairly civilised colony of Manchu Fish-skins; a tale of river exploration and survey work in small skiffs purchased from the Gilyaks; a region of alluvial gold, where, as Pang put it, 'a man could wash out enough in a day to keep him in luxury for a month'; and a lot about furs and ginseng, and so on. I don't believe much in the rich gold story myself, for if it were true the Chinese would have made their way there in thousands long ago, mud and mosquitoes notwithstanding; I expect Mihara has seen it through a magnifying-glass, for it is always part of the game of the General Staff to

create the legend of an El Dorado in this region. But if that coolie isn't romancing, our worthy Major has brought back something even more interesting than gold, and something which ought to provide the Government at Tokyo with a fair pretext for sending out all the scientific expeditions they want."

"It sounds like radium."

"No, nothing in the mineral line. It seems that somehow in that wilderness of dismal swamps, Mihara was led by some friendly Manchu Fish-skins to an oasis of good habitable land, comparatively free from insect pests, where he and the coolie recovered from the fever and semi-starvation which had killed off the rest of their party. Here he spent nearly two months, picking up all sorts of information from two Manchu headmen, old fellows who remembered the days when the Dragon Flag was still an emblem of dominion and power on the great rivers, men whose fathers had carried that flag to lonely outposts long since forsaken and forgotten by the Son of Heaven."

"Père Venault speaks of these Manchu colonists," I said, "derelict amidst forests and swamps, and reverting to savagery. But what on earth could Mihara have found among them that the mandarins of Kirin and Heilung-chiang don't know all about through their ginseng gatherers and tax-collectors?"

"Your mandarin, as a rule, is not interested in botany or zoology, or indeed anything in the nature of scientific research, unless it be to prove by classical quotations that there is no new thing under the sun. I believe that both the things which Mihara has brought back from that mysterious oasis in the swamps are mentioned in the classics,

but as neither can be developed for commercial and taxable purposes, the officials' interest in them is purely academic, if not supercilious. Anything with an undecipherable inscription on it excites their curiosity, of course. One isn't surprised to find our old friend, Hsü Shih-chang, collecting Egyptian rubbings, but you wouldn't expect him to get excited about a branch of willow, however remarkable, or the hoof of a quadruped, however large?"

"And is that Mihara's treasure-trove?"

"Yes. I gather that he believes this willow to be the original and genuine golden willow, familiar to Chinese poets and scholars as a radiant feature of the landscape in the legendary period of the Flowery Kingdom, a scene in which the Dragon of the Prime was also a conspicuous object. According to Pang's enthusiastic description, when you see these trees at a distance, with the sun shining on them, they look like beacons on the road to the Lohans' Earthly Paradise; and even when you hold a branch of it in your hands, it glows like molten gold, down to the smallest twig. You can understand what the discovery of such a tree must mean to a race of landscape artists like the Japanese."

"And what about the hoof?" I asked. "Don't tell me it's a dragon's."

"I can't quite make it out," replied M'Quigg. "Pang calls it the hoof of a '*Shui-Hsiang*'—a water-elephant—which, I suppose, can only mean a species of hippo or rhinoceros. But apart from there being no record of any such animals in Northern Asia, the size of this particular hoof, if correctly described by the factotum, seems to point to an animal bigger than anything in the present-day

rhinoceros line. And that being so," he concluded, "I vote we look in at the Japanese Legation and see whether friend Mihara will tell us something of his travels. I confess to a good deal of curiosity about that hoof."

So we strolled down Legation Street and sent in our cards, with kind inquiries, to Mihara. As already explained, I had known the stormy petrel for years. We had met in many strange places, and were friends, as friendship goes between East and West—that is to say, without anything approaching to real intimacy, but with a good understanding and mutual self-respect. And M'Quigg, with several irons in Japanese fires, had struck Mihara's trail in many a provincial sortie. So that, much to the surprise of the servant who had told us that the *tajen* was too ill to receive visitors, we were ushered up to his bedroom.

A Mihara very different from the well-fed and rollicking roysterer of Kuan Cheng-tzü days was the gaunt and hollow-eyed individual who now bade us welcome ; but the little man, stout-hearted as ever, greeted us with the serene smile which the Japanese code requires of its wounded warriors, and professed his pleasure at the honour of our visit with a breezy cheerfulness admirable in one so obviously ill. East is East, if you like, but some of its virtues come uncommonly near to the finest flowers of Greek civilisation at its highest and best, and Mihara was a splendid specimen of that Samurai stoicism which, for the sake of a high ideal of patriotism, will go to its grave as to a bed, with proud head " bloody but unbowed."

We had cocktails and the usual ceremonial small talk before M'Quigg brought the conversation round to our host's recent journey ; but we were hampered

in any direct approach to the gratification of our curiosity, inasmuch as neither the golden willow nor the mysterious "water-elephant's" hoof were anywhere in evidence to afford us a seemingly unpremeditated opening. Mihara talked freely enough of things in themselves extremely interesting—of the vastness and potential wealth of the undeveloped wilderness through which he had wandered, of the certainty that some day a hungry world would insist on making it fertile and fruitful by means of railways and scientific forestry and river conservancy on a big scale. "A land that must be made to flow with milk and honey," he said. From that he went on to discuss the uncertainty of Russia's Far Eastern policy and America's growing interest and interference in Manchurian affairs, displaying, as usual, a remarkable grasp of the international situation and a clear perception of the economic causes of conflicts to come. He realised quite clearly, for example, that Japan's struggle for a place in the sun in Manchuria and Eastern Mongolia had not ended with the battle of Moukden and the Treaty of Portsmouth, and he professed to wish to see England co-operate with Japan in opening up all this rich country, for the benefit of international trade, before Russia got busy again with new bases in Eastern Siberia and the Germans at her back. Which subject we discussed in all seriousness, and without any allusion to the fact (of which we were all quite aware) that St. Petersburg was at that very moment coquetting with Mr. Harriman's railway schemes, and that Washington was directing its rough-and-ready diplomacy to prevent the conclusion of a new Russo-Japanese *entente*.

Next he talked of the dangers and difficulties

of travel in the Sungari country, of fever-laden swamps, where mosquitoes and gadflies will kill a horse in two or three days by sheer force of numbers and blood-thirstiness ; of vast regions inhabited only by scattered bands of savage Gilyaks, with here and there small colonies of adventurous Chinese, sable-trappers, ginseng-seekers, or gold-washers ; of the Fish-skin tribes, their strange customs and precarious existence, and of the mighty Tamara and Iluam fishes on which they live. All very interesting ; but still no word of the oasis of the golden willow or the "water-elephant."

M'Quigg steered the conversation delicately into botanical and zoological channels, but Mihara led it gently back to the subject of the possibilities of Kirin and the Primorsk as the great goldfield of the future. Here again he suggested united Anglo-Japanese enterprise as an object well worthy of our attention and support, and he showed us samples of alluvial gold which he said came from somewhere in the vicinity of Lake Hinka, washed in muddy streams apparently very similar to those discovered and described by Lange and other explorers in the Amazon jungle. He thought it fairly certain that a company would be formed in Tokyo for the exploration of this region. Did M'Quigg think that any of his principals would be interested ?

"Look here, Mihara," said M'Quigg, "I'm going to be quite frank with you. Gold propositions are always attractive, but they need a deal of discussing, and we've taken up a lot of your time already. Before we go, won't you tell us about the golden willow-tree and the big animal whose hoof you have brought back ? You know that sort of thing is really more interesting to us than politics or trade."

Mihara gave the somewhat boisterous laugh with which the Japanese are wont to conceal embarrassment. "Ah," he said good-humouredly, "I see. Is it not strange how swiftly the slightest rumour spreads in Peking! And is it not true, as the Chinese proverb says, that he who would travel with secrecy must leave his servants behind? Of course I will show you these things. It did not occur to me that you would be interested in such trifles. I am only taking them home because the botanical and zoological societies of Japan are always anxious to find something which may give them an honourable place in the international field of science, and it seems to me right to encourage them as much as possible. You see, we Japanese have no missionaries in China, so it is necessary for us to create an intelligent public interest in the country by other means."

While speaking, Mihara had pulled a pig-skin box from under his bed, and having unlocked it, produced a large canvas parcel and a long tin case. From the latter he drew a bundle of damp cotton wool wherein were wrapped two branches of the golden willow. They were still fairly fresh-looking, and the texture of the bark was much the same as that of the ordinary willow-tree, but its sheen was that of living gold, as rich and radiant as if the wood had been covered with the pure metal. Even the leaves, though faded, had preserved a lustre as of copper burnished with gold. One did not need the imagination of an artist to realise what a glorious thing of beauty such a tree must be, like an oriflamme gleaming in the sunset on some great silent river's bank.

"Do you think that slips of these branches would grow?" asked M'Quigg. "What a scoop

for you, Mihara, if it could be done and the golden tree be named after its discoverer!"

"If it can be grown," replied Mihara, "to add one more to the beauties of Japan, it will never be known by my insignificant name, but by one which would remind our people of the glories of our Imperial House. I shall be very grateful, my friends, if you will take a slip from one of these branches and send it to your famous gardens at Kew, where they may be able to make it grow. The rest I shall take to our botanical experts at Uyeno." We undertook to do what he asked.

Mihara next turned his attention to the canvas package, and from it, after much unwrapping, produced a browny-black, crinkly object, about the size and shape of a large hat-box, a pad much larger than that of any elephant I had ever seen, and of far tougher texture. It had been roughly preserved with alum and arsenic, and stuffed, *tant bien que mal*, with raw cotton. M'Quigg took it up and examined it carefully.

"Mihara," he said, "this find of yours will bring you more fame, if you want it, than any number of gold-mines. I don't profess to be much of a zoologist, but I know enough to be perfectly sure that this pad belongs to some monstrous big beast at present unknown to our museums. Only let a description of it get into the London and New York papers, and you'll soon have plenty of big game and fame hunters heading for your swampy wilderness."

"It is for that reason," replied Mihara quietly, "that I must ask you, my friends, to say nothing of this matter until it has been considered at Tokyo, and the species of the animal determined by our scientific experts. It is all that I have to show for a

very difficult journey, which killed my friend and very nearly killed me."

"All right," said M'Quigg. "But tell us where and how you got it?"

"Oh, it was just a bit of good luck, to make up for many calamities," replied Mihara in his dry precise way. "It was near the little patch of good country where we met the Manchu Fish-skins, and where I remained, recovering from fever, for several weeks. One day the headman came to tell me that, guided by a great gathering of kites and other carrion-eaters, they had found the carcass of a 'water-elephant' close to the edge of a thick belt of rush-covered marsh, and he took me to the spot. It was a very great beast, something like a Javan rhinoceros, but larger and with a longer neck. It had been quite recently killed, probably by one of its own species; there were several deep wounds in its side, and the head was all knocked about."

"Did you take any measurements?" I asked.

"Only roughly—I had no measuring-tape with me,—but I took a photograph of the animal as he lay there, with two of the Fish-skins sitting on his head. Unfortunately this was stolen by the Gilyaks with nearly everything else I possessed. So, you see, I have only this hoof as evidence of the truth of my story!"

"Man a-dear," said M'Quigg, lapsing in his emotion into his native Donegal, "here's the biggest story of the century, and we're not to say anything about it! For the love of Mike, Mihara, say you'll let me cable five hundred words to the 'Times,' and we'll all be famous for ever! By this time to-morrow every street in London, Paris, and New York will be plastered with handbills,

announcing the discovery of an Asiatic Dinosaur by Mihara, the celebrated Japanese explorer."

"A Dinosaur?" said the little man. "Yes, that would be a glorious find ; but, of course, we do not yet know what kind of beast it really is. It is because he was so big and so strange that I carried this hoof many miles even when I was sick with fever, and all my baggage gone. But whatever it may turn out to be, my friends, the world must learn of it from Tokyo. You will soon hear, for I leave for Japan to-morrow."

But the world never heard of it from Tokyo, for the ship in which Mihara sailed from Tientsin for Shimonoseki was caught in a typhoon off the coast of Japan and foundered with all hands. And with the stormy petrel were lost the diary of his journey and the geographical information which would have enabled the world (or, at all events, the Japanese Government) to locate the oasis in the paludal wilderness and the habitat of the unknown quadruped to which the hoof belonged. And so, after persisting for a little while in the form of rumours, generally conflicting and derided, the story of Mihara's discovery of a fabulous monster in remote Manchuria passed into the limbo of mythical travellers' tales.

M'Quigg, who went on business to the States shortly afterwards, did his best to excite public interest, and to organise an expedition which should follow Mihara's trail and discover the haunts and the identity of his "water-elephant," but his reception as an apostle of Asiatic exploration was such as to cure him of all further desire to convince an unbelieving world. Then came the *rapprochement* between Russia and Japan, and with it a new political situation, which effectively precluded any

idea of British or American exploration in Manchuria. M'Quigg often talked of going off by himself, as Mihara had done, to search for the oasis of the golden willow, but I think he realised that he was too old for that sort of thing. To the day of his death, it remained nevertheless the vision of a quest to be fulfilled, a dream that some day must come true ; but when he followed Mihara on the longest and last trail, it was still unaccomplished.

But I, who have preserved a fragment of the golden willow, which refused to grow at Kew, often think of the tale which Mihara told us on that summer's evening in Peking, and I wonder to whom it will be given, and when, to follow in the footsteps of that stout-hearted traveller, and to solve the secret of the great beast which he discovered in the depths of those primeval swamps. When the Andrews' expedition has had its fill of fossils, it might do worse than to organise an aeroplane expedition to explore this uncharted wilderness.

One word more, addressed by way of postscript to the sceptical. Six months after Mihara's death I happened to be dining with his Excellency the Viceroy of Manchuria at Moukden, and the conversation turned to a discussion of the stormy petrel's journey and his discovery of the "water-elephant." The Governor of Fengtien, who was present, listened in silence for some time, while the Viceroy discussed the matter solemnly after the manner of aged scholars, with learned quotations from the classics, which proved nothing except the peculiar quality of his memory. Finally, during a lull in the conversation, the Governor turned to me, and, in the excellent English which he acquired

at Harvard, quietly observed that Mihara's story was perfectly true, and that in those unexplored regions a species of giant rhinoceros undoubtedly did exist—as a matter of fact he himself had recently received, as a gift from an official at Sansing, the tusk or tooth of one of these monsters, bought from a native Fish-skin.

Naturally I was all agog. "Let us have that tusk, your Excellency," I said, "and I guarantee that in England we will organise a scientific expedition to find the animal to fit it."

The Governor smiled. "No," he said, "I think not. These animals have been there for thousands of years, and they do no harm. At all events, they are less dangerous to China than scientific expeditions. Perhaps some day it may be advisable for us to invite foreigners to come and seek for the '*Shui-Hsiang*,' but not at present. Now if, at the right moment, Mr. Roosevelt, for instance, were willing . . ." He looked at me reflectively, and smiled again.

## IV

## A COUP THAT FAILED

AS I look back down a long vista of memories, in which M'Quigg and old Kuan figure against a dim background of ever-shifting scenes, my thoughts generally turn, sooner or later, to certain red-letter days and nights, which stand out clearly from the very monotone of our exotic existence at Peking, like trees beside a long and level road. One of these I remember with especial vividness of detail—the 15th of November, 1908, a day that left its mark on China's history. On the previous day rumour, thousand-tongued, had run, swiftly spreading, from the Imperial City. The Son of Heaven, by all accounts, was dead. Many and various were the versions given of the death-bed scene, some (concocted for, or by, foreign journalists) obviously fantastic, others plausible enough, but all alike imbued with the atmosphere of mystery and awe essential to the Oriental mind on such occasions. From all these rumours there gradually emerged the melancholy fact that in his lonely pavilion of the "Ocean Terrace," brow-beaten and friendless to the last, his Majesty Kuang Hsü had come to his end, seen off on that long journey by the ruthless old Dowager and by his own grim, forbidding Consort. His death, of course, had not been unexpected. For several days edicts had reported the coming and going of famous

physicians, and on the 13th, the Empress Dowager had appointed Prince Ch'un Regent and his infant son Heir Apparent. Also, ever since the Old Buddha had deprived him of all power and dignity after the *coup d'état* of '98, he had been so often reported to be in immediate peril of death, that the political significance of his end was practically *nil*. But next day, hot-foot upon the news of his decease, the city was filled with rumours of an impending catastrophe that might well give the *coup de grâce* to the shattered fortunes of the Dragon Throne. The Old Buddha herself, they said, had been seized of a mortal sickness, and was likely to follow her nephew to the Halls of Hades before the day was done. Others denied the story, pointing out that only the day before her Sacred Majesty had presided at a meeting of the Grand Council, and issued her orders with all the wonted vigour of her indomitable spirit. She had been unwell, it was true, but the Dalai Lama had cured her by means of a miracle-working image of Buddha. This report gained credence from the fact that the Grand Council had been convened at daybreak in the palace, and that an edict had been issued that very morning in the name of the Empress. But at midday came a fresh crop of rumours, and the city heard that Tzu Hsi had been smitten with a sudden fainting fit, and lay at the very point of death.

Faint at first, as if terrified of their own tidings, all the whisperings of flurried eunuchs, nervous officials, and anxious money-changers gradually took on form and substance of authority. By sunset, as rumour gave place to the certainty that the formidable old autocrat who had ruled the Empire for over forty years was nearing her end, many idle tongues were loosened, and those who

had cause to hate or fear the Yehonala Clan told grim tales of a dark deed done at midnight in the pavilion of Ocean Terrace Palace. The wretched Emperor, they declared, had been despatched in advance to the Nine Springs by order of the old Dowager, so soon as she realised that her own sickness was mortal.

This was one story. Another, equally widespread, said that the Emperor had been done to death by Li, the Chief Eunuch, but that his death had been avenged by means of poison put by his favourite concubine into a dish of crab-apples and cream, prepared for the Dowager's midday meal. Swiftly to every quarter of the city these rumours spread, growing with every hour—dark tales of plottings, stratagems, and treasons in high places, whereat timid citizens made haste to fasten their doors and shutters and hide their valuables in secret places. On all sides were portents and forebodings of the truth that, with the great Tzu Hsi, the glory of the Dragon Throne must surely pass and the mandate of Heaven be taken from the Manchu dynasty.

M'Quigg and I had been out that morning duck-shooting in the marshes of the Nan Hai Tzü, so that when we returned towards sunset we knew nothing of these critical events, the news of which was already blocking the telegraph wires with official messages and carrying consternation to the farthest frontiers of the Empire. That the Emperor was dead we knew, of course, but saw no reason to expect that his passing from the scene of his humiliation would disturb the established order. It would merely mean a new Regency controlled, as of old, by the Old Buddha. But as we made our way through the dense traffic of the Chien Mén (the great gate used by China's rulers in passing from

the Imperial City to the Temple of Heaven), we became gradually aware of something ominous afoot, of an unusual undercurrent of haste and silence in the streams of people making their way through the battlemented gate to and from the Chinese city. There was a vague yet unmistakable expression of a common emotion in the faces and gestures of the crowd, the exposition of a race-mind accustomed to associate dark deeds in palaces with disaster for the "stupid people." Amidst the hurrying pedestrians there were the usual droves of coal-laden camels from the western hills, the usual creaking water-carts and ramshackle jinrickshas, but the familiar raucous cries of their drivers and coolies were hushed as if in recognition of a common calamity. Even the shrill clamour of the fruit-vendors and fortune-tellers, which generally rises above the turmoil of traffic in the *enceinte* of the gate, was noticeably less. M'Quigg, ever alert to the moods and tenses of the Chinese, drew my attention to these things.

"I wonder what's up," he said. "By the pricking of my thumbs, something unpleasant has either happened or is going to happen. Except that they pay no attention to us, there is something in the air, something in the way these people are behaving, which reminds me of the day when Von Ketteler was killed by the Boxers and the siege of the Legations began."

"Maybe," I suggested, "it is because of the Emperor's death."

"Not a pawnshop-keeper will sleep any the less soundly for that. Since the old lady stepped up on to the dais in '98 and relegated him to the back premises, the poor devil of an Emperor has never been more than an empty name—a defence-

less pawn in the Old Buddha's masterful and ruthless game. His death will not disturb either the Viceroy of Chihli or the hawker of persimmons at the Yamen Gate. No, I suspect that something much more serious has happened. You know, Prince Ch'ing came back from the Eastern tombs last night in a devil of a hurry. Anyhow, whatever it is, old Kuan will surely know something about it."

"Shall I look in at the American Legation and ask Colts whether they've heard anything startling from the Waiwupu?"

"No, don't bother. Colts is at the Club by this time, playing his everlasting bridge. Come in and dine to-night and you'll hear all the news, and more besides. I've got a rare bird coming—Penting, the American Senator, an earnest globe-trotting uplifter, determined to discover and proclaim the whole truth about the East, so long as it agrees with his own ideas and the current doctrines of the Y.M.C.A. As a counter-irritant, we'll have friend Cantegril, who by this time has probably wired everything that's worth wiring to Paris. Trust a banker to ferret out anything that may affect the Bourse. You know his comprador is in with Chang Chih-tung's hungry crowd, besides being pretty thick with the Yokohama Bank people, who probably know more about Peking politics than anyone else. We ought to have quite a nice little symposium and do the Senator a lot of good. But come in now and have a cup of tea. We'll hear what old Kuan has to say."

As we passed into M'Quigg's compound, Kuan emerged from the gateman's lodge. In the dim light of that narrow den I caught a glimpse of several elderly men, all grave of mien and earnestly engaged

in talk, one of whom I recognised as Kuan's relative, the gateman of the Japanese Legation. Kuan's presence in the gate-house meant that something out of the common must have happened, he being a stickler for the proprieties and little given to familiarity with the outdoor staff.

"Well, Kuan," said M'Quigg, speaking in Chinese, "what news to-day? As we passed through the Chien Mén there was much coming and going, but very little talk."

Before answering, Kuan called to the house coolie to come and take his master's cartridge-bag and the game. Then, standing to attention in the Chinese manner, his hands covered by long sleeves hanging loose, he looked at us and smiled. It was the smile which Chinese traditions of stoicism prescribe as becoming to the Superior Man struggling with adversity, a mask of cheerfulness, assumed in deference to the principle that our misfortunes are our own affair. Your humblest coolie knows that it is his duty to smile even when asking for leave to bury his father. Kuan's smile was obviously of this order.

"The news since this morning is bad, *tajen*," he said. "They say that before the day is done the Old Buddha will have put on her robes of State and been borne by the Dragon on high. A cloud of misfortune has darkened the sun. It is a day of evil omen for Peking, and for the people of the Middle Kingdom."

I realised as he spoke something of the depth of reverence, combined with personal affection, which the people of North China felt for the imperious but kind-hearted old woman who had ruled them so firmly, yet on the whole so wisely, for nearly half a century.

"But," said M'Quigg, "who knows that these rumours are true? The Old Buddha has weathered many bad storms. Have there been any edicts to-day?"

"I do not know. The Japanese Legation have received nothing officially. But the news which I have heard is trustworthy, and it means trouble."

"What have you heard?"

"There is great fear among those eunuchs who are the Old Buddha's eyes and ears in the palace—the 'rats and foxes,' whom so many have good cause to envy and to hate. I have a cousin who manages one of the Chief Eunuch's many pawnshops: he tells us that old Cobbler's Wax<sup>1</sup> has had men out all day collecting his squeezes, and that he is sending a lot of pearls and gold bars for safe custody to the Russian Bank at Tientsin. Also I know that two of the physicians specially summoned to attend on her Majesty came from the palace in haste shortly after noon, and have already taken train for the South. The porter of the Wagons-lits saw their luggage on the platform. *Tajen*, the great tree has fallen, and the birds are seeking shelter elsewhere."

"It certainly looks like it," said M'Quigg. "Well, every tree must fall; even Old Buddhas must die. It would be a good thing for Peking if the Regent were to make a clean sweep of these eunuchs. Meanwhile, let us have tea."

With a whispered word to the gateman, old Kuan passed to his pantry. As we went through the courtyard there met us a savour of sandalwood and myrrh, and I observed, in front of the Goddess of Mercy which stood by the study door, one of

<sup>1</sup> The common nick-name of Li Lien-ying, Tzu Hsi's Chief Eunuch and confidential retainer.

M'Quigg's sacrificial bronzes in which three sticks of the Dalai Lama's special Tibetan incense were slowly burning.

When next, at dinner-time, I passed M'Quigg's gate lodge, all Peking had learned that the Empress Dowager was dead. I had looked in at the Club, where the news had created a flutter of excitement sufficient to suspend for nearly half an hour the inevitable game of bridge, at which their Excellencies were wont to mix with the vulgar, and pontifically trump each others' best cards amidst a babel of polyglot and superheated argument.

Amongst the journalists and the working bees (as distinct from the butterflies) of the Diplomatic Body, the political effect of the Regency was being discussed over cocktails in a manner calculated to impress the uninitiated with a sense of profound mysteries discreetly revealed and cautiously received. Mudlam of the "Daily Megaphone" was giving to an admiring audience at the bar his exclusive description of the death-bed scenes in the palace, which he had just cabled, a vivid mixture of local colour and fertile imagination, particularly effective as a "scoop," inasmuch as Morton of the "Thunderer" happened to be away in Tientsin. On the whole, the effects produced upon this cosmopolitan gathering by the death of the great ruler, whose existence we had so long taken for granted, seemed curiously irrelevant. Cathcart of the Customs, who walked home with me, expressed something of this feeling in one sentence. "Why should we argue," he said, "as to how or when they died, or whether either of them killed the other? What matters to us now, and to China, is whether the Manchus can produce a ruler strong enough

to hold the monarchy together ; and if not, what next ? ”

At M'Quigg's dinner, conversation turned naturally to the momentous events of the day. At the outset it was less a feast of reason than a flow of soul, for our friend the Senator, a very prosperous word-merchant, was determined to improve the occasion by holding forth on the effeteness of monarchies, the impropriety of polygamy and eunuchs, and the mediæval foolishness of China's religious superstitions. As the result of interviews with Wu Ting-fang and Tang Shao-yi, and rapid visits to several Y.M.C.A. centres at the Treaty Ports, he was convinced that the time had come to persuade the Chinese to adopt the Republican form of government, with Christianity as its State religion. His was the not uncommon type of mind which, having achieved success by native audacity and astuteness in its own narrow field, emerges to confront a world wherein all its most sacred symbols and values, even all its sonorous eloquence, are nothing worth, and therefore resolves that the said world must be remoulded in accordance with the standards of Zenith City or Little Bethel. To make China like America—happy, virtuous, and free—nothing more was required, from his point of view, than the application of American ideas to the improvement of China's morals, and of American machinery to the development of her material needs. Why not pension off the Manchus at once, and let Sun Yat-sen and his friends carry out their programme of making China a Christian Republic ? He had seen Sun at Canton, and thought him a mighty smart man.

Under the Senator's flow of eloquence, Cantegril showed signs of impatience. Like most of his

countrymen, the genial agent of the Alsatian Bank possessed a sound native taste, and a good deal of acquired knowledge, in the science and art of gastronomy. In his philosophy, Emperors might perish and dynasties totter to their doom, but the serious business of dining should be inviolate, and a dinner at M'Quigg's was a thing to be treated with respect, regardless of all political crises. His epicurean soul was sorely vexed, not so much by the Senator's opinions, as by his inability to subordinate them to grateful appreciation of a menu in which Kuan had certainly surpassed himself. At his own table, Cantegril insisted on the Lucullan principle that, in the earlier stages at least of a good dinner, conversation should be general and cheerful—a lively thing of gossip, quips and Rabelaisian persiflage,—avoiding politics, religion, and everything that might tend to secrete bile and thus disturb the delectable process of digestion. And this dinner of M'Quigg's, both in its *mise en scène* and ingredients, was of a kind to deserve the undivided attention of a connoisseur. The room itself was a rich symphony in carved redwood, *sang-de-bœuf*, and curtains of old gold brocade, softly lighted with lanterns of red lacquer. Kuan and his "No. 2," in long robes of plum-coloured silk with silver girdles and tasselled official hats, moved softly and with dignified precision ; and the dinner was a triumph of the major-domo's inventive faculty of nice selection. I am sure that a recherché meal, served *à point*, afforded just as much satisfaction to him as it did to those who ate it, and to *épater le bourgeois* the old fellow would take as much trouble as Cantegril himself. For the edification of that barbarian mandarin, the Senator (Cantegril and I being of the elect), he had composed a menu

calculated to convince any intelligent stranger of the superior civilisation of China, and the magnificence of M'Quigg. Rare and delicate were his dishes—caviare and sturgeon from the Sungari, a *riz de veau aux cèpes*, sand-grouse from Mongolia and a sweetmeat of his own invention, made of honied dates, walnuts, and cream, together with Berncastler chilled, and Clos Vougeot warmed, to perfection. But it was chiefly in the little details that one perceived the hand and mind of one who knew that for wise men a dinner means something more than food and drink. On the table, glorious chrysanthemums of tawny gold in a silver bowl ; on the side-board a pyramid of quinces and Buddha's fingers, filling the room with the subtle fragrance beloved of Chinese scholars and poets ; at dessert, in each filagree finger-bowl, a tiny water-lily, and goldfish with filmy tails that waved like pale flames. All of which Orient display was of Kuan's own devising, for the greater glory of M'Quigg and the preservation of his own face.

But as far as the Senator was concerned, it was all love's labour lost ; Kuan might just as well have given us pork and beans on tin plates. From soup to cigar he took everything just as it came, entirely unimpressed, and wholly absorbed in expounding his views on the political and moral regeneration of China, to be achieved by the infusion of American ideas. For a while we endeavoured to divert the conversation to lighter topics ; but Penting, accustomed to hold the floor by stonewall persistence, stuck to his theme like a poultice ; and eventually Cantegril, inwardly fuming, was stirred to contentious argument. An astute exponent of international finance, with wide experience of Chinese affairs, his political opinions were always of a

shrewdly practical order. A typical *méridional* was Cantegril, addicted in his hours of ease to genial gasconade and Gargantuan laughter, a *bon-vivant* with a keen palate for good wine and a quick eye for a pretty woman ; but in his serious moments hard-headed, rigidly logical, and keenly alive to the main chance. His interest in the fortunes of the Manchu dynasty and the Chinese people was based not on sentiment, but on the facts of the situation, fairly faced : and transcending all these facts were the interests of the Alsatian Bank and those of its worthy representative. At any other time and place, the Senator's preposterous schemes for creating a new heaven and a new earth in the East would have been dismissed with a laugh and a shrug. But as that turgid tide of eloquence flowed on, the feeling that there was no escape finally produced in him a secretion of wrath-matter which, as I have said, prompted him to dispute many of the Senator's premises and to deny all his conclusions. At this point I perceived the dawn of a twinkle in M'Quigg's eye. Until now he had paid his eloquent guest the courteous tribute of an apparently rapt attention.

Once roused, Cantegril was out for blood. With Gallic *élan*, he carried the war straightway into the enemy's camp, giving it as his deliberate opinion that, as regards public and private morality and intellectual culture, China's civilisation had produced a type of human being, and a state of society, infinitely preferable to anything that America could ever hope to produce. He denounced American civilisation as the result of a system of democracy which despises, when it does not ignore, philosophy.

The Senator had suspended his sonorous periods, and was roughly dismembering his sand-grouse,

when Cantegril's whirlwind onslaught came upon him out of the silent void. It caught him one, so to say, in the solar plexus, and left him silent while men might count a score. He gave Cantegril a look of pained surprise, such as one sees upon the face of a wayfarer whose unsuspecting foot has met a fragment of banana peel. Then he looked at M'Quigg, but found no guidance in his unspeculative eye. So he turned to the foe.

"I'm afraid I don't quite get you," he said. "Do you mean to say that you, a bank manager, really believe we ought not to try and bring these people into line with Western civilisation, and give them the benefits of our scientific knowledge and progressive institutions?"

"What I believe as a bank manager," replied Cantegril, "has nothing to do with moral philosophy nor with my private opinion as to China's best means of seeking the ultimate happiness of her people. As a banker I happen to be identified with a phase of Western progress which consists in selling Chinese bonds to the foreign investor, but I do not pretend that in the long run these transactions are likely to prove either profitable or beneficial to China. I console my philosophic soul with the reflection that, like missionaries and machine-guns and other adjuncts of your 'Open Door,' they are inevitable. But I do not attempt to delude myself or others with the absurd belief that these things mean progress."

The Senator's expression suggested the feelings of one who, jauntily moving through pleasant pastures, suddenly finds himself floundering in a treacherous morass. His mental equipment obviously contained nothing calculated to serve him in debate with an adversary armed at all points

with arguments based on local knowledge. Avoiding the encounter, he professed to cover his retreat by a dignified flank movement in a direction where he might hope to find support.

"Don't you agree with me, Mr. M'Quigg," he said, "that it would be a good thing for this great country to scrap all its old Manchu junk and get into line with the spirit of democracy? And don't you think we ought to help them to do it?"

"It's a big problem," replied M'Quigg, "with several sides to it, and none of them easy to deal with on textbook lines. It would be best, I think, if the Chinese could work out their own salvation in their own way, without interference. Now that the old Empress is gone, I admit that it looks like trouble ahead; but, after all, a good many dynasties have disappeared without disturbing China's social system."

But Cantegril, not to be diverted from his prey, returned to the attack.

"Yes, Monsieur le Sénateur," he exclaimed, "it is a big problem; but permit me to observe that the welfare of the Chinese people is not a question of monarchy or republic, but simply a matter of economics and justice. Give them a strong government which can keep order and administer the law, and they will be satisfied, no matter where it comes from, or by what name you call it. I am speaking, *bien entendu*, of the Chinese nation, not of the handful of *bois-brûlés*, the intellectual nondescripts whose stock-in-trade is a *potpourri* of foreign ideas and catchwords. I, like yourself, monsieur, am the citizen of a republic; but surely you have only to look across your borders to Mexico and South America to perceive that many republics would smell as sweet by any other name. I agree

with M'Quigg that China is in for trouble, but it seems to me that the blame for most of it must lie with the Western nations, who have dislocated the country's finances and filled the heads of the rising generation with a lot of poisonous nonsense. *Franchement*, all this talk about the magic virtue of democracy and the spirit of progress, what is it but a smoke-screen of words to cover our several policies of encroachment and exploitation ? ”

What with the disturbance of his gastronomic sense of fitness and his Gascon impetuosity in argument, our friend was evidently near to forgetting his manners, and M'Quigg began to look uncomfortable. Fortunately the Senator, despite his Middle Western rush of righteousness to the head, possessed certain saving graces of good temper and dry humour.

“ Wal,” he observed to the table in general, “ assuming that all they need is a government that'll handle things as they've been handled since the days of Noah, and give them the sort of justice they're used to, what are their chances of getting from these old Manchus anything that will hold together now that the old Empress is gone ? I gather they're a pretty poor bunch, and if that's so, why not let Sun and his friends take a hand ? ”

Now, for reasons that have nothing to do with this story, Sun Yat-sen was Cantegril's *bête noire* ; his very name was enough to provoke the whips and scorpions of the banker's wrath. So, feeling it in my bones that he would seize upon the Senator's reference to that grandiloquent gas-bag as ground for another fierce assault upon the base uses of sham democracy, I thought it best to intervene.

“ Who knows ? ” I said ; “ the Regency may turn out better than we think. After all, it isn't so

much Peking and the Court that matter nowadays as the quality of the mandarins they put into the chief Viceroy jobs—Tientsin, Hankow, and Canton. If Li Hung-chang and Liu K'un-yi were alive, China might have an easier time of it. Unfortunately, of all the old great men there's only Chang Chih-tung left, and there don't seem to be any big new ones coming on. If the Emperor had not died . . .”

“ Things wouldn't have been any better,” said M'Quigg. “ Ten years ago it was different ; he had a soul of his own then, some honestly patriotic ideas of reform, and a fair amount of courage. If the *coup* had succeeded which he planned, and which Yuan betrayed, in the autumn of '98, I believe that China might have got a fairly decent Government under the constitutional system he had devised. But the ten years which he lived at the Old Buddha's mercy, a prisoner in the 'Ocean Terrace' pavilion, took all the heart out of him, and reduced him to a miserable nervous wreck, afraid of his own shadow.”

He paused for a moment, with a deprecating eye on Cantegril, who was lighting a cigarette.

“ And that reminds me, Senator,” he went on, “ of a rather interesting incident connected with the Emperor's plot, a story that has never been told, because it was safer to forget it as long as the Old Buddha was alive—she was inclined to be rather vindictive about everything connected with Kang Yu-wei's conspiracy against her sacred person. It has no particular bearing upon the present situation, but if you would care to hear it . . .”

“ Why, sure,” said Penting ; “ go right along.”

“ So far as I was concerned, the story began at one of Hart's Wednesday garden-parties at the

end of August '98. I had come up from Tientsin on business, and was stopping at Chamot's Hotel. I remember that garden-party as distinctly as if it were yesterday. It was a broiling hot day, but in spite of the weather the number of guests gathered about the tea-table on the dusty lawn, or strolling round the grounds, was larger than usual in the dog-days. It was a moment when such society as remained in the Legations was glad of any and every opportunity to hear and discuss the latest news. Since June the air had been filled with rumours of plots and counter-plots in the palace, vaguely heavy under the shadow of coming events. Also, from the social point of view, there were special attractions that afternoon, very welcome in our little world, where new faces and new ideas are rare—a party of ladies, guests of the American Legation, and a full-blown British Admiral of the jolly old sea-dog type, globe-trotting in order to acquire first-hand knowledge of the Far Eastern problem.

"I was there that afternoon," said Cantegril. "I remember the band played '*Pinafore*' and the '*Death of Nelson*' in honour of the Admiral."

"Quite so," said M'Quigg, "and I remember talking to several more or less eminent diplomats and thinking to myself that some of us in Tientsin (old Gustav, for instance) were in closer touch with the realities of the situation than the beauty and fashion of Peking—the '*I. G.*' always excepted, and he kept his ideas to himself. It was just the same, you know, before the Boxer trouble began : the Chanceries talked airily of domestic squabbles in the palace, and scoffed at the idea of any trouble likely to affect foreigners. However, to return to the Admiral. I was introduced to him by the

private secretary, and he began chatting at once, in his breezy way, about the Emperor's progressive ideas, and especially about the great review of troops to be held at Tientsin in October, when, for the first time in history, the Court was to leave Peking of its own accord, and, for the first time in their lives, the Empress Dowager and the Emperor would travel by railway and visit a seaport. I said something about the rumour which had reached some of the Emperor's party, that the Viceroy Yung Lu was preparing a plot to seize the Emperor's person on the occasion of this review, and thus to put a stop to the progressive edicts which were creating serious alarm among the Manchu clansmen. The Admiral, all agog for the Emperor's party, was greatly interested, but our talk was stopped by the 'I. G.' coming up to introduce one of the Ministers, and there was no opportunity for renewing it.

"After dinner that evening, there came to see me privily at the hotel one of the young enthusiasts of the Reform party, a secretary of the Grand Council. He was one of the six who were executed two weeks later by order of the old Empress at the Board of Punishments ; but, as some of his family are alive, we will call him Mr. Wang. Things, he said, were coming to a head at the Summer Palace. The Emperor's bitter-tongued Consort (commonly spoken of by the Reformers as 'rat-face') and the Chief Eunuch were continually imploring the Empress Dowager to assert her authority and protect the dignity of the Yehonala Clan against the intrigues of Kang Yu-wei and other protégés of the Emperor. They had succeeded in persuading the Old Buddha that not only her authority but her life was in danger. The Pearl Concubine (the Emperor's favourite) had reported that the

old lady had savagely rebuked his Majesty for lack of filial piety, that her face was darkened, and her sombre moods foreshadowed an impending storm. It would surely break long before the proposed journey to Tientsin. The Emperor's kinsman and friend, Prince Tsai Ch'u, was all for taking a quick offensive, and his Majesty was now prepared to risk all in carrying out a plan which the prince had suggested. But they wanted, in the first place, to ascertain definitely the attitude and sympathies of the British Government.

"I was telling him that nothing succeeds like success, and that all politicians respect a *fait accompli* when there came a knock at the door and the boy announced a visitor. It was the Admiral. He had dropped in, he said, hoping for a smoke and a yarn to take away the taste of a damn dull dinner, and because he wanted to hear more about the interesting programme for that review at Tientsin. They had told him I was in, but not that I was engaged. It was a bit awkward at first, and Wang got up to take his leave ; but I told him in a rapid aside that the Admiral was a friend to be trusted. So he sat down again, and as he understood English fairly well, was able to take part in the conversation. I introduced him as the son of a Cantonese merchant, and said that we had just been talking about the rumours of trouble in the palace. After that we went on talking about them and about the Tientsin plot, but all in a general way. Wang played up very well, and told the Admiral several interesting things, citing as his authority either the native Press or his friends of the Canton Guild. Between us, in half an hour, the Admiral (who was writing a book, of course) had got a lot of picturesque materials and a fair idea of the general situation.

He grasped all its essential points and needs with the sure instinct of a successful leader of men. It was the sort of situation in which, as he said, he would have loved to take a hand. If it had been possible, he would have put off his trip to Japan and stayed on to see the fun. At this point Wang, apparently casually curious, asked him what he would do if he were a staunch supporter of the Emperor's side. 'Do?' said the Admiral: 'go straight for the old lady. Give me three trusty bluejackets, a sketch-plan of the palace, a dark night and a sack, and I'd take odds we'd bring her to roost on some perch more convenient than the throne. It's a case of *cherchez la femme*, my boy—*cherchez la femme!*' And with that, laughing his great hearty laugh, he got up and said good night.

"It was just the sort of thing that he would say, of course, and just the sort of dare-devil escapade that had made his fame and endeared his name to every ward-room of the fleet. No doubt that even now the spirit was there, ready and willing for it, had he had the chance, but all the same my imagination couldn't quite see him that night, sixteen stone and scant o' breath, as the Hotspur leader of any such adventure. It was just his playful breezy way. But whether in earnest or in jest, those words of his fell on ground well prepared for just that kind of seed, and led to that which, with a little luck, might have given the Manchus a new lease of life and China a decent government.

"I confess I thought no more about it at the time, but a few days later I had good reason to remember that conversation. It was about ten o'clock at night, and I was thinking of turning in, when a pebble rattled on my window. I looked out and saw two men standing in the porch. One

of them stepped out, and I recognised Wang. In a low voice he begged me to come down. He wished to speak with me of an urgent matter, but his friend did not want to be seen by any of the hotel people. So I went down, and we walked together as far as the Water Gate. There, in the shadow of the wall, we stood and talked.

"Well, they were following the Admiral's advice, and doing it that very night. Three of their fellow-conspirators had left the city at sunset, and at 3 a.m. would be waiting at a spot agreed upon, close by the Kun Ming Lake at the Summer Palace. They had got a ladder and a plan showing the position of the Old Buddha's apartments. Also, they had got a sheet cut in two long strips, which Wang said would be handier and more dignified than a sack. The moon was in her first quarter, very convenient for their purposes. The Emperor's faithful eunuch, Sung, and the Pearl Concubine were in the plot ; they were to contrive that old Li and the eunuchs in attendance on her Majesty and the 'rat-faced one' got something in their tea which would give them a sound sleep. They had a cart at Haitien, in readiness to bring their captive to the city, so soon as the gates were opened. Their plan was then to take her to the house of a certain censor of the Emperor's party, and there, under pain of death, to make her sign a decree finally renouncing public life, and conferring full power of sovereignty upon his Majesty Kuang Hsü. Other edicts had been drafted, one ordering the arrest of Kang Yi, Yu Lu, and other implacable foes of the Reform party, and another transferring Yung Lu's foreign-drilled forces from Tientsin to serve under a new commander as his Majesty's body-guard at the capital. The plot appeared to

have been carefully worked out, and the cool determined bearing of Wang and his companion gave me the feeling that this desperate adventure might be something more than a forlorn hope. As Wang said, it was bound to be a case of sink or swim before long, and they preferred to risk all on a bold stroke at once.

" You may be wondering why, in such a perilous venture, with the throne at stake, they should take a foreigner into their confidence. There were three reasons. Firstly, Wang believed in me because once before I had been able to get him out of what might have been a serious scrape with old Chang Chih-tung at Hankow. Secondly, they needed the help of someone they could trust to hold the rope by which they were going to let themselves down over the Tartar city wall, and then pass it down to them, so that they might use it in getting over the Chinese wall at the Hsi Pien Men. Finally, if their *coup* came off, they wanted me to go at once to the Legation and do my utmost to enlist the Minister's sympathy and support. They had an extraordinary and rather pathetic belief in the British Government's benevolent interest in the Emperor's plans for radical reforms, which, as you may remember, every foreigner in China had been advocating for years, and in which the Legation had professed to see the dawn of a new era. No doubt had they succeeded, all the Legations would have hastened to express their enthusiastic congratulations and whole-hearted support for the new régime, and prided themselves on the moral effect of their progressive policy. As it was, the Empress won the game, and their Excellencies were the first to deplore the wretched Emperor's 'unfortunate lack of judgment,' and to send their wives

to pay their respects to the Old Buddha triumphant. Wang and his friends were probably influenced by the belief that, in a crisis, England would actively intervene, on grounds of humanity as well as of self-interest, and they may even have regarded the Admiral's off-hand words as an inspired utterance intended to guide them.

"Be that as it may, the curtain was up, and the play begun. It was agreed that, if they succeeded, a messenger would reach me shortly after daybreak to say that I was wanted at the Legation ; and the rest was on the knees of the gods. We went up on to the wall and Wang produced a rope ; they made it fast, let themselves down the sloping face, and I dropped the rope after them. Before going over the side, Wang shook hands, and said, 'Good-bye ; either I succeed or I shall not come back. We have our revolvers.' Then they disappeared into the darkness, and I went back to a sleepless bed.

"Well, the plot was well and boldly planned, but the fates were against Kuang Hsü, and it came to grief, as the result of deplorable blundering or bad luck, at a point where all serious obstacles had been surmounted and success seemed assured. The five conspirators met as arranged at a spot on the south side of the Kun Ming Lake, and, leaving one man in charge of the cart, scaled the enclosure. There they found a boat ready for them, and rowed silently to the Marble Barge at the end of the lake-side terrace. Having reached that part of the palace which they knew to be occupied by the ladies of the Court, two remained on guard at the gate, while the two others scaled the wall and proceeded to the spot indicated on their plan as the private apartment of the Empress Dowager. The

two men entrusted with the execution of this, the most delicate part of the business, had been chosen because they were the strongest and most active of the party. They made their way unchallenged through a maze of courtyards, and having, as they thought, reached their goal, they quietly forced the door, found their quarry peacefully sleeping, and gagged and bound her as she lay. Then, slipping the two strips of sheet around her, the stronger of the two hoisted her on his back, and in ten minutes the whole party was on board the boat again, making for Peking and the road to glory. It was only when Wang came to unwrap the old lady and put her in the cart that, to his horror and dismay, he saw that they had bagged the wrong fox. Either the sketch-plan was at fault, or in their haste the raiders had taken a wrong turning : unfortunately, neither of the young men who carried out the kidnapping had ever seen the Empress in the flesh. Daylight was near ; it was too late to try again. There was nothing for it but to make their way back as fast as possible. So taking their captive with them (she turned out to be one of the consort widows of his Majesty Tung Chih), they hurried to the city, got in just as the gates were opened, and deposited the old lady in a safe hiding-place. Then by trusty messenger they sent word of what had happened to Sung, the Emperor's personal attendant, bidding him warn his Majesty that the plot had failed, and that the only hope left lay in giving immediate command of the foreign-drilled troops at Tientsin to Yuan Shih-k'ai, and prevailing upon him to come speedily to the rescue of the Reform party.

" All this Wang told me when he came to see me next morning, a picture of hopeless dejection. It was not for himself, but for the Emperor and the

cause, that he lamented his failure and feared its results. As regards the kidnapping of Tung Chih's widow, he was not greatly concerned, for she was more in sympathy with the Emperor than with the Yehonala Clan, so that there was nothing to connect her disappearance with the Reformers. Nevertheless, the business was bound to stir up a hornets' nest in the palace, and to preclude all hope of another attempt to secure the person of the Old Buddha. He feared that she would now be moved to one of her ungovernable fits of rage, and vent it on the unfortunate Emperor. Kang Yu-wei, the Cantonese leader of the Reformers, was having audience of his Majesty that morning ; unless something could be done, and that quickly, with the help of Yuan Shih-k'ai, the Emperor's day was over and the Reform movement doomed.

"Well, you all know the rest. That morning the Emperor gave audience to Yuan Shih-k'ai, entrusting his fortunes and his fate to the hands of the betrayer ; that same afternoon the Old Buddha sent for him and ordered him to have Kang Yu-wei placed under arrest for speaking disrespectfully of her private morals. Five days later the blow fell, which condemned Kuang Hsü for the rest of his days to eat the bread of affliction and humiliation, and which relegated to the Board of Punishments all the leading Reformers except the two who had escaped to Shanghai. At no time during the crisis of the Old Buddha's savage reprisals did any hint leak out that Wang's attempt to seize her person had been discovered. The secret was well kept, and the kidnapped Dowager (deposited one night anonymously near the Palace Gate) never knew, of course, who her captors were or whence they came.

"In the long run a nation's destiny depends upon the character of the race, but every now and then its fortunes would seem to be determined by pure chance, some trivial device of idly laughing gods—the shape of a woman's nose, a lame horse, the indigestion of a Court favourite, or the quacking of a flock of geese. Who can say what China would have been to-day if those young men had opened the right door?"

"A very thrilling bit of history," observed the Senator, "and an interesting subject for speculation. But they took the wrong door, and that's all there is to it. Now, Mr. M'Quigg, I'd be real glad to have your opinion on the present situation."

"No, Mr. Penting," said Cantegril, who during M'Quigg's yarn had recovered his usual *bonhomie* under the soothing influences of port and a good cigar, "let us have no more arguments to-night. Let us digest this most excellent dinner in a lighter mood. Believe me, Chinese politics, taken seriously, play the devil with your liver. Ah, here is old Kuan with coffee on a lordly dish ! M'Quigg, let us have it in the library, and we'll talk of the latest scandals of London, Paris, and Washington, books and theatrical news, Shakespeare and the musical glasses—anything you like, except politics and finance. You know your Sancho Panza, Senator ? It was he who said, 'Talk not of halters in the house of the hanged.' "

I doubt whether the Senator had ever heard of the knight of the rueful countenance or his oracular squire, but he took the hint, and for the rest of the evening joined cheerfully in a general conversation which, by a determined effort, we steered clear of everything connected with Chinese politics and "uplift."

Later, M'Quigg, preceded by Kuan with a melon-shaped red lantern, had said good night to his guests at the gate lodge. The Senator had started off with Cantegril, earnestly explaining to this bored, but now courteous, listener the manifold blessings of woman suffrage. On the pretext of fixing up a game of golf, I lingered behind. The shadow of a faint suspicion, the glimmer of a doubt, was hovering at the back of my mind. For one of M'Quigg's occasional weaknesses was a propensity to pull, with elaborate gravity, the legs of the mighty, to cast the bread of whimsical invention upon the waters of pompous credulity.

"That was a good yarn of yours, Peter," I said. "It's the first I've ever heard of your having had anything to do with Kang Yu-wei and the martyrs of '98."

"Everything comes to him who waits, old fellow," he replied. "Also, don't forget that it's the first time the Empress Dowager has died, and the first time we've had an American Senator to dinner. The occasion called for a special effort, didn't it? And everything went off very well, considering."

## V

## AT THE SHRINE OF THE AZURE CLOUD

FOR reasons which I have already explained, whether the ancient city were blanketed in mud or smothered in sand-storms, M'Quigg preferred the burden and heat of the dog-days in Peking to the beaches and bungalows of Peitaiho and Tsingtao. Indeed, those fashionable seaside resorts, frequented by diplomacy *en déshabillé* and the plutocracy of the Treaty ports, with all their teapot storms of social rivalry and shibboleths of etiquette, could offer few attractions to one whose philosophy had become so closely akin to that of the Chinese, so deeply imbued with their innate sense of proportion and relative values. Not his to eat the lotus at a banquet of baked meats or to the sound of horns. His genial humour and catholic soul had acquired the East's secret of detachment, the faculty of looking dispassionately and from a distance, not only at the human comedy, but at himself, conscious ever of the mystery of existence and the insignificance of the *ego*. Of the forms and ceremonies, the alarms and excursions of polite society *in partibus*, he was an interested but always detached spectator, so that, when the leading lights and ladies of the Legation forsook the capital for their cool retreats on the shores of the Yellow Sea, he sighed a sigh of contentment at the prospect of three months'

untrammelled ease and contemplative calm in the shady seclusion of his own compound.

Nevertheless, neither the manifold amenities of that delectable spot nor the sedative of advancing years could restrain for very long the wandering spirit in his feet. Like the lord of Montaigne, he had a horror of routine, of letting the coach of life sink deep into the ruts of any comfortable habit. So, after a week of tropical rain, when our evening constitutionals on the wall had become a burden to the flesh, and the young moon moved softly in a sky of purple velvet towards the western hills, it frequently occurred that M'Quigg would suddenly announce his intention of following her good example. On such occasions old Kuan usually turned up at my office early in the morning to say that his master was going to spend a few days at the hills, and, business permitting, would be glad of my company.

The nature of business at Peking in July and August generally allowed of a Friday-to-Tuesday week-end without disturbing any troublesome sense of duty, and, despite the peculiar attractiveness of the city at this siesta season, I seldom missed the chance of one of these sorties. For no matter how much one might enjoy the murmurous sun-steeped pageant of Peking in its midsummer abandon and expositions of *al fresco* life, there were days when one understood the feelings of the Psalmist, who, for all his love of Zion, lifted up his eyes unto the hills. During a visitation of sandflies, for instance, or when the highways of the city lay axle-deep in odoriferous mud, the call of those pine-clad terraced hills would steal like distant music into the back of one's mind and there abide, becoming more insistent every hour.

One steamy August afternoon, feebly struggling between duty, in the shape of a pile of work, and an exposition of after-tiffin slumber, I became aware of a shadow athwart the sunlight of my open door, and, looking up, saw the homely wrinkled visage of old Kuan. Noiseless as a cat he had come, motionless there he stood, and on his placid features I detected the faint glimmer of an expression which, from long experience, I knew to be indicative of satisfaction with the matter in hand.

"*Tajen*," he said, "we are going to the hills this evening, and my master hopes that you can come. May I tell Ah-kee to pack the *tajen*'s bag so that it may go with the cart before four o'clock? Word has come that guest-rooms are available at the Shrine of the Azure Cloud, and my master proposes to ride out when the heat of the day is passed."

Now, as a rule, our favourite eyry at the western hills was a little monastery called the Pearl Grotto, which, from the summit of the Ssu Ping-tai, looks down upon the roofs and terraced courtyards of the larger temples, still frequented in the hot season by certain missionaries and members of the diplomatic world who prefer the hills to the sea. A very restful and secluded spot, this shrine of the Pearl Grotto, and many happy memories can I recall even before M'Quigg's days of summer evenings spent there with its wise old abbot in good companionable talk, while the distant city lay wrapped in a yellow haze of dust, and the west wind whispered softly in the cedar-trees below.

For myself, I confess to being, in such matters, a creature of habit. Having found the *feng-shui* which make for contentment of body and soul, I see no good in seeking farther afield; and M'Quigg,

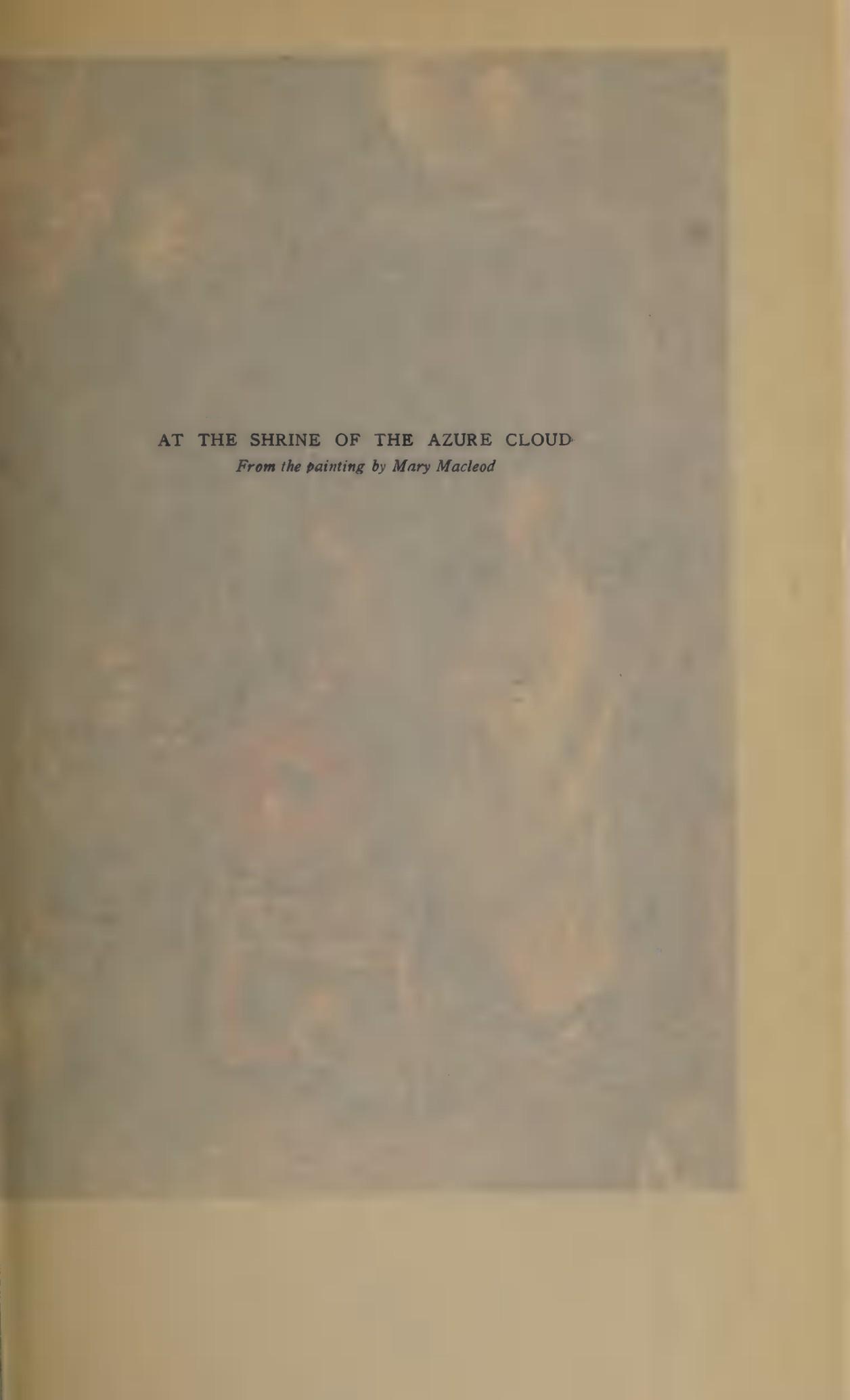
despite his aversion to ruts, was not the man to forsake a congenial spot and good familiar faces for any restless love of change. Why, then, was he going to the Shrine of the Azure Cloud, a longer road, with possibly a worse welcome at the end of it? There lingered in my mind more than one unpleasant experience of impromptu visits to temples, where the night had been filled with discordant music, the crackling of thorns of foolishness under the fleshpots of the Philistine. Revolving these things in my mind, I hesitated.

"If the *tajen* has writing to do," observed Kuan, "there are quiet guest-rooms on the terrace at the Azure Cloud, and it will be much pleasanter working there than here. The city is not healthy these days. It is the season of the water-melon and swarming flies. The voice of the mourner is heard in the streets, and the only trade which prospers is that of the coffin-makers. It is far better at the hills."

"There is no work that cannot wait," I said. "But why do we go to the Azure Cloud? Why not to the Pearl Grotto, where the nights are much cooler?"

"My master sent a messenger two days ago to tell the abbot at Pearl Grotto that we were coming, but it seems he has let the guest-rooms from to-morrow till Monday to a party of Americans from the Y.M.C.A. He sent word, however, that as there is no one this week at the Azure Cloud, he would secure rooms for us there for these three days, and we could then move to his temple."

"All right, Kuan. My kit will be round in half an hour, and I shall be ready to start at five. Let them send word to the *mafoo* to have the ponies saddled."

A large, rectangular, blurry illustration occupies the background of the page. It depicts a landscape scene, likely a shrine or temple, with various figures and architectural elements. The colors are muted and indistinct, appearing in shades of grey, brown, and green.

AT THE SHRINE OF THE AZURE CLOUD

*From the painting by Mary Macleod*







Out through the Chien Mén, skirting the Tartar wall to the western gate of the Chinese City, we rode towards the sunset, following awhile the first stage of the time-worn road where endless trains of camels plod their patient way to Kalgan, Kiachta, and Kashgar, e'en as their forbears did when there were kings in Babylon. Then, as the tinkling of their bells grew fainter and died away to the northward, and the sun sank slowly towards the purple hills, we jogged along through peaceful hamlets and fertile fields, a smiling harvest land, where the tall millet waved like banners in the breeze and sturdy husbandmen, their day's work done, sat smoking and chatting under trellised vines. As the daylight faded softly into dusk, a cool north wind came through the passes of the hills, and from the dim distance ahead the deep note of the great bell of Wo Fo-ssu calling the faithful to evening prayer. Our way was one upon which unquiet years have cast no shadow of change, immutable in all its landmarks as the deep-rooted mind of the race itself. Under its potent time-defying spell of tranquillity, trouble fell from one's mind like a garment, and Black Care, unseated from his pillion perch, was left far behind.

On account of the heat we had ridden slowly, so that it was past eight o'clock when we turned into the valley which shelters the monastery of the Azure Cloud. The moon, in her second quarter, had cast a shimmering veil over the distant plain, and on the wooded hills a magic robe of silvery radiance and mysterious shadows. They knew their craft of wind and water well, those astrologers and necromancers of the Yuan dynasty, who built this lovely shrine with its marble "stupa" and raised terrace-garden in the silent places of these

sheltered hills, where kindly dragons sleep in fern-decked pools, and no winds of unrest can ever blow. Of all the temples near Peking that testify, even in decay, to the glory that once was China, none carries so clear a message of contemplative austerity in religion and art as the Shrine of the Azure Cloud, where the Emperor Ch'ien Lung came to find relief from crowding cares of State and to compose classical odes in praise of moonlit waters or the flowering cherry-tree. Hard by a sulphur spring of magic virtues still stands the yellow-roofed pavilion which the great Manchu ruler built as his own Imperial rest-house. To-day the glory has departed, most of the yellow lions and unicorns which guarded that sacred hornéd roof have been carried into captivity, scattered to the ends of the earth, and for a modest sum you or I may sleep in the odour of a once inviolate sanctity. Until the destruction of the Summer Palace by the outer barbarians triumphant in 1860, the Azure Cloud was still the haunt of native scholars and poets, and a favourite holiday retreat for the eunuchs of the palace, whose burial-ground lies farther up the valley. But since the day when the foreigner enforced his right to live at the capital, under the very walls of the Imperial city, an abomination of desolation has fallen upon all the high places of the ancient gods—ay, even the Temple of Heaven itself. Forsaken of their former patrons, receiving no bounty from the tottering throne, the hill temples gradually have become a summer resort for unbelievers and a happy hunting-ground for globe-trotters and curio-collectors. Even a priest must live.

Cheng Fu, head priest at the Azure Cloud, a tall, thin, old fellow of a shrewd but kindly countenance,

met us at the main gate of the temple and bade us welcome. He and M'Quigg were old friends.

"It is a long time since we met," he said, "but it is a good wind that brings you to this remote unfrequented place. Your servants arrived half an hour ago, and your rooms are prepared, the honourable guest-rooms to the west of the marble terrace. In a little while your dinner will be ready; the table is laid under the *shen-yin* tree."

"'Tis a good ending to a fortunate day," replied M'Quigg. "After the sultry city, *lao ho shang*, the cool and quiet of your Azure Cloud are like a foretaste of the Earthly Paradise. We will wash and then dine. Later, when they have tolled the curfew-bell and your prayers are done, you must come and smoke a cigar with us, and we will talk."

On the moonlit terrace, under a tree whose slender branches gleamed like molten silver against the dark background of cedars, old Kuan was putting the finishing touches to a table as daintily set as any at the Carlton or the Ritz. At our approach he called to the No. 2, who thereupon swiftly appeared, like a slave of the lamp, with cocktails and smoked salmon on a lacquered tray. The whole scene, indeed, was curiously suggestive of something taken from the "Arabian Nights," of a dream-play staged by deft ingenious jinns. Between the gardenias and oleanders of the terraced garden, pale fireflies gleamed like fairy lamps; from a great cryptomeria behind the altar of the Laughing Buddha came the quivering call of a nightjar, and in the shadow of the terrace wall a great white owl swooped low on velvet wings. But to describe the ethereal loveliness of that scene, the haunting beauty of that summer's night, a man would need to write as Kreisler plays, drawing from

life the inner heart of song. All I know is that its unfading memory abides, a joy for ever.

As we sat down to dine, the temple bell gave out the first slow notes of its unchanging evensong, deep notes that echoed down the valley in rippling waves of softly throbbing sound. The voice of the bell, like that of the priest, chanting his "Om Mani Padme om," seemed somehow to deepen, without disturbing, the silvered silence of the hills. Like the cry of a night watchman on his lonely rounds, or the sound of a ship's bell at sea, it evoked a comfortable sense of protective influences, of tutelary spirits, hovering near in space.

As its last lingering notes melted into silence, I became suddenly aware of another strain of music, infinitely soft yet crystal clear, a gentle whispering and tinkling sound, proceeding apparently from the tree under which we were sitting. It was a faint elusive melody that turned one's thoughts instinctively to elves and sprites, a fairy music, as of tiny silver bells amidst a murmur of invisible wings. At first I thought it must be some ingenious device of the old priest, some delicate contrivance of Eolian harps or glass trinkets, such as the Japanese hang amongst the cherry blossoms to catch the fitful breeze ; but nothing of the kind could I detect amidst the branches clearly outlined in the moonlight. The tree itself, of a species I had never seen before, was a light-limbed and dainty thing, with the slender beauty of a silver birch and the rippling foliage of an aspen, a very fitting place for elfin music. From a dark-blue porcelain jar at its roots, the coils of a *hibiscus* had wound themselves about the stem and lower branches, and flaming blossoms glowed like rubies overhead against its green and silvery sheen.

"Peter," said I, "has Titania ever had a twin-sister in China? Either I am dreaming or her minstrels are coming this way."

"I was wondering what you were twisting your neck about," said M'Quigg. "Is this the first time you've heard the music of the *shen-yin* tree?"

"I've been here before, but never noticed it, and I've certainly never seen another like it. 'Tis a beautiful thing—the sort of tree Dulac would paint for Omar, singing in the wilderness. But where does the music come from?"

"The Chinese, combining, as is their way, the mystic with the material, call it the 'spirit-silver' or fairies' treasure-tree. To their minds, the faintly metallic tinkle of those rustling leaves suggests the handling of celestial sycee by invisible hands. It is a very rare tree—I know of only two others in this part of the world,—and there are all sorts of curious legends and superstition attached to this particular specimen, mostly uncanny."

"For instance?"

"Well, here comes our friend Cheng Fu. Let him tell you himself. But don't rush him. Give him a cigar and let him talk, and we'll work round to it gradually. He has a way of shutting up like a clam if he thinks you are trying to pump him."

The old priest sat down, and having lighted his cigar, began straightway to unburden himself of certain matters that were vexing his pious soul. The Azure Cloud, he said, was fallen upon evil days. The contributions of the faithful had dwindled so grievously that there was no money forthcoming for urgently necessary repairs. Only last week a storm had carried away part of the roof of the hall containing the famous frescoes of Heaven and Hell, and unless he could find funds to mend it, the

plaster work would soon be hopelessly ruined. He had sent an urgent appeal to the chief abbot at the Lama Temple and to several rich eunuchs of his acquaintance, but these folk were never very prompt about money except to collect it. Truly, the lot of a priest was not a happy one in these days, when the shrines of the gods were slowly falling into decay. For a hundred dollars he could have the roof mended, but he saw no way of getting it quickly except by selling some of the treasures of the shrine. And this would mean grievous loss of face.

"Get a couple of lanterns, *ho shang*," said M'Quigg, "and let us have a look at the damage done."

As one who has sown good seed and sees hope of a glad harvest, the priest made off in the direction of the kitchen.

"If we can preserve Heaven and Hell, not to mention Cheng Fu's face, for a hundred Mexicans, it will be money well spent," said Peter. "I don't know how you feel about it, but to me there's something tragic in this twilight of unhonoured gods, and something very pathetic in our old friend's gallant struggle against hopeless odds. The spirit which moves him is precisely the same as that which leads the Dean and Chapter of St. Paul's to call for subscriptions to preserve their venerable edifice. Cheng Fu, unfortunately, cannot write to the *Times* about the Azure Cloud."

The hole in the roof, exhibited by the faint light of lanterns borne by three ragged acolytes, had made a passage for the wind and the rain just above that scene in the panorama of the Buddhist Heaven which depicts the Seven Lakes of Golden Sand, and the seven rows of trees that bear rare

and refreshing fruit. The plaster figures of the blest located in this section of the Elysian Fields looked damp and dismal enough, but the damage so far was not irreparable. Beyond them, all intact, was a crude but not unpleasant presentment of the street of silver, pearls, and crystal, where the radiant ones feast for ever out of rice-bowls and wine-cups, all inexhaustible as the widow's cruse.

"Except for the absence of harps," observed M'Quigg, "the Chinese idea of Paradise is not unlike the Hebrew's vision of the New Jerusalem. We shall acquire merit by having that roof mended." This pious resolution having been conveyed to the priest, and received with fervent benedictions, we made our way from the musty precincts of the gods back to the cool night breeze on the moonlit terrace. The table had been cleared and replenished with an ice-bucket and whisky and soda. In the background Kuan and the No. 2 were busy rigging up mosquito-netting over our camp-beds.

I was wondering by what circumlocution M'Quigg was going to lead up to the subject of the fairies' treasure-tree, when, giving me a premonitory wink, he remarked casually to the priest that as the night was so fine, it would be pleasanter to sleep out on the terrace than indoors. "I think I'll have them put my bed here, under the tree," he said.

Cheng Fu looked at him with a puzzled expression.

"*Ma tajen*," he said, "you must always have your joke. But, believe me, this is not a matter for jesting."

"I am not joking," replied M'Quigg; "I mean it. I would really like to prove that all those old stories are nothing more than a foolish superstition."

A little breeze came freshly from the north, and in the swaying branches of the *shen-yin* tree the elfin music grew to a lively tinkling saraband.

"Listen to that," went on M'Quigg. "Don't ask me to believe that spirits who make such bewitching music can ever be really vengeful or unpleasant."

"You and I are old friends," said the priest, "and the merit which you have acquired as a benefactor to the temple ensures you the favour of our guardian spirits; nevertheless, I know, and you must know, that it would be very foolish to sleep under this tree. You will find an even cooler place under the pomegranate over yonder."

"But why," I intervened, "should we not sleep here, and what are these old stories of which my friend speaks?"

The priest raised himself from his chair.

"The Superior Man was wise," he said, "when he refused to speak about the unseen gods. But come with me a little way down the terrace where they cannot hear us, and I will tell you why it were better to ride upon a tiger than to sleep under that tree."

So we took our drinks and sat on the terrace wall, while Cheng Fu related the legendary story of the *shen-yin* tree, of things which he himself had seen and heard, and of others recorded in the chronicles and sutras. The story went back to the genesis of Buddhist mythology, to a time when the gods and antigods of Ind made love and war in a land of gently-flowing rivers and Elysian fields. It was for the wooing of the beautiful and capricious daughter of a Daitya, ever craving for something new, that Ganapati, the elephant-faced god, devised a marvellous path of dalliance and planted it with

*shen-yin* trees of his own creation. So fascinating was their silvery beauty under the hornéd moon, so entrancing their fairy music, that the snows of the fair one's virginal aloofness were turned to flames of tender passion. Thus Ganapati attained his heart's desire, and in the first flush of triumph at the winning of his bride, he vowed that for evermore the *shen-yin* tree should preserve inviolate the memory of that golden hour, and that no mortal should ever sleep beneath its whispering shade under pain and penalty of death. Moreover, he commanded the spirits of the tree, that it should never grow in the cities or upon the highways of men, but only in the untrodden ways of the hills and in the courts of shrines dedicated to the worship of the gods.

"The spell of Ganapati has remained unbroken and unbreakable throughout the ages," observed the priest. "You, who are not of the Middle Kingdom, have gods of your own ; your wise men laugh at what you call our foolish belief in *feng shui*, and the spirits which live and move unseen behind the painted veil of life—and this although many of your own beliefs, as I have heard them expounded by your missionaries, are far more difficult to believe than most of the miracles and mysteries of our Buddhist religion. As to the *shen-yin* tree, we who live here have seen with our own eyes enough to convince any man that what I have told you is true, that none may sleep under it and hope to escape swift punishment of the gods."

"Tell us some of the things that you have seen," I said. "If, by common report, the tree is possessed of evil spirits, I should have thought that at all events no Chinese would have wanted to defy their malific powers."

"In my time, now close on forty years," he replied, "only three of our people have slept under the *shen-yin* tree, and by all three the penalty was paid. The first was long ago ; he was an Iron-capped princeling of the Court, a drunken profligate, without respect for gods or men. He did it for a bet, and when the abbot tried to warn him, only laughed and mocked at him for a fool. Till midnight he and another evil liver sat there, drinking and singing ribald songs, then sent for his bedding and slept the sleep of the drunken. At sunrise he awoke, and jeering at the abbot, called for more liquor. That same evening he was smitten of a sickness which took from him all use of his limbs, and his talk became as that of a babbling child until the day of his death."

"It sounds like a simple case of delirium tremens," observed M'Quigg aside to me. "And served him right too."

"The second fatality was in a sense accidental," continued the priest. "He was a poet and a scholar, one who often came here in spring and autumn to read and meditate in solitude. An orthodox Confucianist—that is to say, a sceptical agnostic,—but a kindly man withal, and one who would not willingly have given trouble or offence to any fellow-creature. It was his custom on warm nights to read by the light of a lantern under the *shen-yin* tree. I had begged him never to sleep there, and to humour me he had promised not to do so. But one night drowsiness must have crept upon him unawares, or else in his heart he made light of my warnings, for when I arose at dawn, I found him there asleep, with his head resting on the book he had been reading. Two days later he took the cholera and died."

"I remember him," said M'Quigg. "That was the worst cholera season on record. It was said that over forty thousand died in the city."

"The third case occurred only a year or two ago. He was a friend of mine and, though an unbeliever, a generous benefactor of the temple, a rich eunuch, whose country-house stood at the northern end of the valley. He, like you, Mr. M'Quigg, desired to test the spell of the *shen-yin* tree. But he at least had some excuse, in that he suffered unceasing pain from an incurable disease, and knew that in any case his days would be few and full of bitterness. Therefore, said he, let me prove or disprove Ganapati's magic, for whatever happens will be well. If no evil befall me, you will be cured of these foolish fears, and if swift death come to me, I shall be well content. So he slept under the tree, and next morning returned home none the worse. But that night a great storm swept through the valley, his house was struck by lightning and burnt to the ground, and he and several of his household perished."

"These are strange tales, *ho shang*," I said; "but since you believe that they are true, why do you not cut down the tree and rid your temple of its dangerous influence?"

"The evil lies not in the tree," he answered, "but in the stiff-necked pride of those who will not believe. To the Shrine of the Azure Cloud, and to those who faithfully follow the Way, the spirits who fulfil Ganapati's word have ever been well-disposed and greatly helpful."

"Angels and ministers of grace, in fact," said M'Quigg, "so long as you do not desecrate the memory of Ganapati's honeymoon. But, my friend, even assuming that the tragedies of which you have

spoken were due to supernatural causes, does it follow that the spell must work inevitably and always? There was a time, you know, and not so long ago, when one couldn't build a railway or open a mine in China, for fear of disturbing some sleeping dragon and incurring the wrath of spirits just as unreasonable as those of your *shen-yin* tree. But times have changed and with them the temper of your jealous gods. Have not our steam-engines and telegraphs overcome the forces of *feng shui*, and tamed the dragon, even to the very gates of the Forbidden City?"

"Defied, not defeated," replied the priest, "and who shall say but that, because of these things, the favour of the gods is now withdrawn from us? And after all, of what significance are one or two revolutions of the wheel of life in the sight of Shiva, the self-existent? A little while ago, the manifestations of which you speak had no place in the shifting shadow-play of man's illusions; another turn of the wheel, and they too will be forgotten, buried deep beneath the ruins of dead cities. But Karma and the gods abide for ever."

"To come back to the subject of the tree," I said. "Have you any evidence that Ganapati's prohibition applies also to us unbelievers from overseas?"

"Beyond all question," he replied. "The law is over all; it knows no frontiers of high mountains or deep seas. Ask Mr. M'Quigg to tell you what happened to his friend Tan *tajen* of the British Legation."

"He means Tomlinson, the second Secretary," said M'Quigg to me in English. "As a matter of fact, there never was any proof that he violated the taboo. That, I believe, is pure surmise on the part of our revered friend. All we know is that he spent

a week here, that on his way back to the city his pony ran away with him, and at one of the stone bridges under the wall he came off and struck the parapet with his head. Moreover, though he got concussion of the brain, from which he never quite recovered, it didn't kill him."

Though the priest had only a smattering of "pidgin" English, he must have understood this last remark.

"Ma tajen," he said, gravely addressing M'Quigg, "it is not wise to make light of such matters. If the mind and thinking principle of a man be destroyed, even though his body live, the man himself is no more. You are only pretending to be perverse and obstinate, I think, so that I may be provoked to generate wrath-matter, and you may laugh at me for a dotard."

"No," said M'Quigg. "You are wrong. I am quite serious. I do not believe in these evil spirits of yours, and I would like to convince you that they exist only in your imagination, fed on old wives' tales, and fortified by one or two curious coincidences."

The priest rose slowly from his seat. "Your rock of unbelief cannot be moved by any flood of words," he said. "It is time to sleep, and I must go my round and see that the doors are closed. But before I go, let me remind you of what happened here to *Pei-laoyeh*, the Frenchman, only two years ago, and ask you, as a friend, to humour my foolish request."

With these words he left us.

"Does he mean Bélancourt of the Customs?" I asked. "I remember hearing something about his having been seriously ill just before he was transferred to Shanghai the summer before last.

Wasn't he the young fellow who laid his heart, for all men to see, at the light fastastic feet of Mrs. Davidson?"

"Yes," replied M'Quigg. "He was one of the most fervent and at the same time guileless worshippers at the glittering shrine of that 'Belle Dame sans merci.' She played with him for a little while, as a kitten plays with a ball of string. The curious thing about his brief career as a humble *cavaliere servante* to that alluring but cold-blooded Dulcinea was that Davidson paid him the unusual compliment of noticing, and even resenting, his attentions; he who, until then, engrossed in his studies of Tibetan texts, had gazed complacently as from a height upon his lady's flower-strewn path of dalliance. I used to see a good deal of Davidson at that time, and I realised that something must have occurred to disturb the normal placidity of his temper. Bélancourt may only have been the straw that broke the back of his *laissez-faire* philosophy, the bone of chance in a crisis of contention, long deferred. At all events, Davidson showed unmistakable symptoms of jealousy, a fact which seemed to afford no little satisfaction to that wayward 'flower-heart,' his wife. The more morose and suspicious his humours, the more demurely gracious her acceptance of the dog-like devotion of the bashful but determined Bélancourt. Thus the youngster came to be frequently invited to join in her ladyship's merry little week-end picnics to the hills. It was at one of these, here at the Azure Cloud, that his sentimental adventure came near to being his end."

"What happened?"

"Old Cheng Fu would have you believe, of course, that he incurred the wrath of the gods by insisting on having his bed put under the *shen-yin*

tree, but, as a matter of fact, he didn't sleep in it, so that no sacrilege was committed. From what I know of the facts and actors in this romantic comedy, there is no reason to attribute to any supernatural agency the phenomenon of a huge centipede in Bélancourt's bed. It bit him three times before he could get clear of the mosquito-netting, brush off the venomous brute, and kill it. I happened to come out here a week later, and old Kuan gathered from the temple gossips a good many details that were never mentioned in polite society's version of the affair. He learned, amongst other things, that there had been a bit of a scene between Davidson and his wife at dinner, that afterwards madame had invited the infatuated youth to go with her and admire the beauty of the marble 'stupa' by the light of the moon, and that Davidson had spent half an hour hunting for scorpions with a lantern and a glass jar amongst the ruined walls behind the temple. Davidson was always dabbling in entomology, you know. When I add that he subsequently had a whisky-and-soda under the tree where Bélancourt's bed had been prepared, I think that Ganapati's faithful sprites may be acquitted of any complicity in the matter. All that old Cheng Fu knew about it, however, was that, just as he was turning in about midnight, he heard a frightful row on the terrace, and when he got there found young Bélancourt howling and writhing in pain."

"I didn't know that a centipede-bite was as bad as all that."

"Even if you apply ammonia and antidotes at once, it can be bad enough to lay out a healthy man for a week ; but if you have no remedies handy, it is a dangerous and deuced painful business. All they could do was to administer whisky, inside

and out, and to send the lad into the city by mule litter the first thing in the morning. He was pretty bad for several days. When he got better, old Hart, who always kept his weather-eye open for unpropitious love-affairs amongst the Inspectorate staff, bundled him off down south. Thus ended, happily for all concerned, one fleeting episode in the romantic annals of *La Belle Dame sans merci.*"

"A pretty little story," I said. "No doubt this old terrace, could its stones cry out, might tell us many more."

"I have told it only to point the moral that simple incidents of this kind may easily lead minds predisposed to a firmer belief in absurd legends and the intervention of supernatural agencies in purely mundane affairs."

"All the same, Peter, there are more things in Heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy. Anyhow, it seems to me that, if only to please our good host, you might give these jinns of his the benefit of the doubt, and a miss."

"Stuff and nonsense," said M'Quigg. "You might as well ask me to believe in the banshees and leprechauns of old Donegal. Would you have me lose face before these heathen? Let's have another drink and turn in."

I realised that his *amour-propre* was involved, and I knew that on such occasions something stronger than my powers of persuasion was needed to overcome his semi-Scotch tenacity of purpose. As it happened, that something was forthcoming.

In answer to M'Quigg's call, old Kuan made his appearance.

"Bring us another whisky-and-soda," said his master, "and then fix up my bed under the *shen-yin* tree over there."

The drinks were brought and served by the soft-footed major-domo.

"*Tajen*," he said, "the night air at this season is unhealthy out of doors. Also, there are clouds gathering in the west; it is likely to rain before morning. It is better to leave the bed where it is."

"If it rains I can come indoors. Call the No. 2 boy and do as I tell you."

Old Kuan, very grave of face, came closer and spoke softly, so that no listeners in the servants' quarters might overhear.

"Master," he said, "*pu nung tso*—I cannot do it. As your under-man, I have served you for many years, and in many perilous places, without fear. Often also have I warned you of danger, and you know that I am not to be frightened by children's tales. If, then, I say that I will have no hand in this thing which you propose to do, it is because the danger is a very real one, which none who defy it may hope to escape. *Tajen*, you must not do this thing."

When you came down to bedrock, the relationship which the passing years had established between these two was much more that of friends with a common outlook on life, than that of master and man. M'Quigg, listening patiently to the old man's earnest words, gave me the sort of look that comes into a man's face when his dog has displayed unusual intelligence or fidelity. I am sure there was a twinkle in his eye.

"All right, Kuan," he said, "my blood be upon my own head. I didn't know you believed in these joss-men's tales. Have the bed fixed, and bring me tea and some fruit at sunrise."

"*Tajen*, you can dismiss me if you choose, and I will get upon my donkey and return to the city.

But so long as I am your servant, it is my business to see that you fall into no danger which I can prevent. Therefore, it is my duty to see that you do not sleep under the *shen-yin* tree."

" Supposing I choose to put my bed there myself, how would you prevent me ? "

I think Kuan must have caught a glimpse of the twinkle aforesaid, or detected it in M'Quigg's voice.

" I have heard that if a gong be beaten loudly close to the tree, the spell may be averted," he replied. " There is a very good gong behind the altar, which they use to call the people from the village in case of robbers, or a fire-alarm."

" All right," said M'Quigg. " I climb down. I can't afford to sack you, and I couldn't stand that gong. You may leave my bed where it is."

Old Kuan's pale-blue figure faded into the dim recesses of the servants' quarters. " That's what comes of giving your soul into the keeping of a heathen," observed M'Quigg. " You need never hope to call it your own again. Kuan reminds me of the way Hart's garlic-eating old Ningpo boy used to bully his awe-inspiring master. And so, in all humility, to bed."

But the last word came from Kuan. For, a few minutes later, passing by his den, I heard him talking to someone in the darkness.

" Compared to other *tajens*," he was saying, " our master is as Mount Omi to the Ssǔ Ping T'ai, or as an elephant among chattering apes. Nevertheless, there are times when his moods are captious, and then he must be handled carefully. All great men have this in common, that beneath their wisdom and their courage, there lies the *hsiao haitzü ti p'ich'i*—the heart of a little child."

## VI

### OF GOLF AND OTHER GRAVE MATTERS

IN his Peking days, having found "ease after warre" and a quiet haven of contemplative philosophy after much wandering on stormy seas, M'Quigg was content (as I have said elsewhere) to watch the human comedy in the spirit of one who has paid for his box at the play after a good dinner, and looks forward to sleeping peacefully in his bed when the performance is over. His interest in the players was that of a sophisticated but discerning critic, of one who had no further ambition to find himself facing the footlights in any interlude of love or war. The wild asses at his gates might stamp, and legions thunder by, without ever disturbing the serene detachment of his outlook on life. By close and sympathetic contact with the Chinese, his mind had become imbued with their rugged racy humour, and in the process had acquired something of that instinctive stoic quality which cheerfully accepts an inexplicable scheme of things, but declines to take it, or any human atom thereof, too seriously. Peking was his spiritual home, and he revelled in its atmosphere of ancientry and patriarchal traditions ; but at the same time I think that a good deal of the humorous enjoyment, with which he savoured the well-matured wine of life in his snug *angulus* under the wall of the Tartar city, was derived from daily observing the fussy

little activities, the punctilious pomps and vanities of the Legation cosmos, a little world which took itself seriously enough in all conscience. From his comfortable box, looking down on the stage, he had seen many a starred and ribboned Excellency emerge to strut and fret his little hour upon these dusty boards and leave his polite audience wholly unimpressed ; but the earnest futility of the performance and the infinite variety of its comic business never failed to afford him entertainment. He perceived—none better—the deep significance of the silent struggle, the predestined clash of irreconcilable systems, implied by the intrusion of top-hats and gold-laced trousers into the Forbidden City ; but whereas Their Excellencies were apt to regard themselves as heaven-sent makers of momentous history, M'Quigg, like the Chinese, preferred to consider this clashing of systems in the light of centuries rather than of days. In the past history of the race he sought and found justification for the hope that their venerable civilisation would persist and flourish when the last top-hat had been laid to rest in a museum.

Naturally, being an Ulsterman—that is to say, instinctively cautious—and having business relations with several of the Chancelleries, it was not his wont to wear the inner heart of his philosophy on his sleeve for daws to peck at, but in that heart he refused to take seriously the little Tin Gods of Legation Street or to see the dawn of a new era in their manifold traffics and discoveries.

In this respect, as in most others, old Kuan was of one mind with his master. His unperturbed acquiescence in the activities of foreigners, as transient phenomena obviously ignorant of the canons of the Sages and menacing the felicity of the Celestial

system, was not inspired by study of historical precedents, but simply by an atavistic, inarticulate faith in the inevitable triumph of that system over all barbarians and powers of darkness. It might require æons of painful regeneration, but, through them all, the protective law of compensation would always run, like a bright thread of gold through the dark pattern woven of the gods ; and, at the long last, the *Yang* would surely emerge triumphant, the *Yin* be swallowed up in victory, and wisdom be justified of her children. To this simple faith he held as confidently as the Chosen People cling to their belief in a Messiah Who shall lead Israel out of captivity, give them lordship over the Gentile, and rebuild the Temple in Zion. Thus, like M'Quigg, though by a different road, he had achieved the state of stoic equanimity, which denotes and befits the Superior Man, fortified against the slings and arrows of Fortune by a philosophy invulnerable. Far behind him, on his long trail of years of faithful service, he had left "those hard task-masters, the passions" ; the kindly serenity of his homely wrinkled features had become the outward and visible sign of a mind secure against all buffetings of Fate.

Nevertheless, his philosophy being of the East and founded on the humanities, its imperturbability was never of the rigid type achieved by redskin warriors or the Spartan *samurai* of Japan. The cosmic breadth of his placid outlook upon politics and religion was tempered, in the domestic and business affairs of everyday life, by certain habits and fixed ideas ; where these were involved, he was capable of displaying perfectly human feelings in a wholly unplatonic spirit. For example, on the subject of woman and her right-

ful place in the scheme of creation, he held strong views, curiously similar to those set forth by King Solomon in the Book of Proverbs, and no doubt inspired by similar experiences on a smaller scale. Also in matters concerning the preservation of "face"—whether M'Quigg's or his own—he was a positive and inflexible martinet, opposed to all compromise, and liable, when thwarted, to generate violent wrath-matter, the canons of the Sages notwithstanding. Finally, where the milder forms of gambling were concerned, he had his own standard of manners and morals. The important part which fighting quails and crickets had gradually assumed, in a life that otherwise might have become dull, and the fervent enthusiasm with which he was wont on occasion to describe their bloodthirsty and profitable exploits, appeared to me to supply that necessary and saving grace of human frailty which preserves the philosopher from becoming a prig. The old fellow trained and fought his quails in the same genial and sporting spirit as that in which Lord Rosebery keeps his racing stud. As he said himself, they provided him with a stimulating antidote to the insidious influences of monotonous routine, a pleasant mental tonic, corrective of cobwebs, moss-growing, and ruts. They supplied, in fact, the snack of ginger at the banquet of life, without which (as he reminded me when once I happened to discuss with him the ethics of the matter) Confucius himself could not enjoy a meal.

That particular conversation lingers in my memory, because it was one of the rare occasions on which I saw Kuan's poise of impassivity most palpably disturbed. Also I remember well the day—a Sunday morning in early spring, the sun

shining gloriously in a sky of pale turquoise and in the air a vital sap and savour of new life, released from winter's icy grip. I had called in at M'Quigg's place after breakfast to take him out to the golf ground (you couldn't call it a course) for our usual Sunday round. Having found him at his bath, I was whiling the time away in his den, admiring a delightful arrangement of jonquils, dwarf hawthorn, and flowering cherry-trees, when old Kuan came in, armed with his inevitable feather duster. After the usual courtesies we passed to the topics of the day. It was then, all unexpectedly, that, in reply to a casual inquiry about his family, he began to unbosom himself of that which vexed his soul. At the festival of Awakening Blossoms, held on the previous day at the Lung Fu-ssü, there had been, it seemed, a knock-out tournament of champion crickets. In the last round his own pet warrior, a peerless insect freely backed by the fancy, had been defeated and done in by a rival from Tientsin. As if this were not misfortune enough, his wife, instead of sympathising, had seen fit to denounce his sporting hobby as wasteful foolishness—unbecoming to a man of grey hairs and respectable family. How he dealt with "the mean one of his inner chamber" is not recorded, but I gathered that his household must have experienced a volcanic shock of unusual severity, from the very fact that he was not only willing, but anxious, to discuss the subject with me. Only from the fullness of a heart perturbed could such unusual confidence come. In seeking my moral support for the gentle art of cricket-fighting, his idea, I think, was to elicit, even from an alien source, the sympathetic vindication for which his soul craved,—something of a nature more authoritative and comforting than the

conventional condolences of his fellow-gamesters. Was not a man entitled, by universal and inherent right, he asked, to spend his spare time and cash as he might think fit? Was there anything more reprehensible in fighting crickets than playing bridge? And was not the scientific training of quails a pastime just as befitting to intelligent men as hitting a ball about with a stick for hours at a time? But the pith and substance of his appeal to the world-wide brotherhood of sportsmen lay not in these arguments (to all of which I cheerfully subscribed), but in his last apparently irrelevant utterance whereby his system discharged its grievous burden of wrath-matter. It was in the form of a Chinese proverb, curiously like that in which Solomon recorded his liking for the corner of a house-top in preference to sharing a wide house with a brawling woman. The root of the major-domo's trouble, in fact, was neither quails nor crickets, but simply the eternal feminine, that syren's rock upon which so many a man-made bark of stout philosophy has gone to pieces since Socrates his day.

When old Kuan, justifying his own particular path of dalliance, introduced that somewhat disparaging reference to golf, I perceived the cogency and subtlety of an argument which laid a light finger on the vulnerable heel of our own Achilles, gently but clearly pointing at the unmistakable fly of human weakness in the pellucid amber of M'Quigg's catholic and comprehensive wisdom. It was an argument adroitly intended to remind himself (and me) of the truth that the best and wisest of men may have their foibles, and, incidentally, that bachelors usually pay for them less dearly than Benedicks.

I thought it best on this occasion to express general sympathy for the victim of feminine unreasonableness, and an intelligent appreciation of the merits of quails and crickets, rather than to pursue the subject of golf, because, in the first place, golf had nothing to do with the case, and secondly, because I was aware that it would be easier to convince Mrs. Kuan of the veniality, or even the virtue, of quail-fighting than to make her husband sympathise with his master's devotion to the royal and ancient game. For all his genial tolerance and tacit acceptance of the inscrutable ways of us outer barbarians, I knew that nothing I could say would ever persuade him that his master's craze for hitting a ball about on the sandy waste of the Anting plain was anything but a lamentable eccentricity of genius. He could not possibly conceive that any rational being of mature age should not only take pleasure in such an infantile pastime, but make it a continual topic of serious conversation. To him, as I knew, M'Quigg was not mad with the madness common to foreigners ; on the contrary, he honestly revered his master as one in whom the mysterious arts and crafts of the West were wonderfully combined with the true wisdom of the East. The *tajen*'s fondness for golf was therefore something pertaining to the category of monsters, prodigies and feats of strength—those matters which Confucius refused to discuss. It was a thing in itself as inexplicable as the absurd mania for fiddling displayed by another foreigner widely renowned for uncommon wisdom, a fellow-townsman of M'Quigg—the great “I. G.,” to wit,—a *tajen* upon whom the old Buddha had deigned to confer the Yellow Jacket and a Button of the first degree.

Without entirely sharing old Kuan's views as to

the recreations suitable and lawful to the Superior Man, I am bound to admit that M'Quigg's mania for golf was hardly consistent with the usual dignity of his attitude as an emancipated spectator of the human comedy, and that the effect of the game upon his mind was not easily reconcilable with a philosophy founded on an intelligent perception of relative values. For he brought to bear upon it a quality of unbending seriousness, quite as lacking in humour as that displayed by the diplomatic body in regard to the etiquette requisite on sovereigns' birthdays or the order of precedence to be observed at official entertainments. There is no denying that the game often affected him more closely than any arguments of doctors and saints at our gates, or all the rumbling of the distant drums. When its fever was upon him, it seemed to deprive him temporarily of his acute sense of proportion and hearty urbanity ; in the throes of a foozling seizure, he, who in all other ludicrous situations could laugh heartily at himself, looked at life and his fellow-creatures, as through a glass, darkly.

At the best of times the sight of a golf-ball on the tee was sufficient to render him insensible to everything but the hazards and horrors of the game. His eyes saw not the moving shadows on the hills, his ears were deaf to the soaring music of the lark at heaven's gate. On the course, a primrose by the river's brim (if he noticed it at all) was nothing more than a primrose. In a word, when he donned his knickers he doffed his flowing mantle of sense and sensibility ; and the tragedy of it was, that though he took the game so seriously and pursued it so persistently, all his efforts failed utterly to raise him out of the hopeless duffer class. He had all the Ulsterman's characteristic rigidity of body

and heaviness of hand, and, having taken to golf late in life, was clearly destined to remain an earnest inglorious foozler to the end of his days. But, as so frequently happens in such cases, the victim played doggedly on, all unconscious of his doom, ever hoping to discover some "open sesame" to proficiency. Often in those days, as I (a cheerful fellow-foozler) watched him grimly ploughing the desolate sands of the Anting plain, or the grey unlovely mud-flats of the Tientsin course, I felt inclined to sympathise with old Kuan's attitude towards a pastime capable of creating such havoc with one's equanimity. Had his opinion been asked, Kuan would probably have ascribed the root of the trouble to some unexpiated sin of M'Quigg's remote, and probably Scotch, ancestors. Looking back on it now, in the light of recent observation, I perceive that his infatuation for the game was an infirmity natural to a certain type of masterful mind ; furthermore, that the more pronounced and successful this type, the greater its liability to persistent foozling. We used to poke fun at M'Quigg in those days for finding, in alleged business negotiations at Yokohama or Hongkong, a pretext for trying his luck on greens of real grass ; but I dare say we would not have done so, had we been able to foresee how great a part golf would come to play in the crises and destinies of nations at the hands of enthusiastic foozlers, who happened also to be Prime Ministers or potentates of the Press.

An incident which occurred in the course of our game on the Sunday morning of my talk with Kuan may serve to illustrate the demoralising effect of the game upon the mind of one usually indifferent to the cussedness of inanimate objects and mindful of the laughter of the gods. We were playing a

hole in the vicinity of the Yellow Temple enclosure, on the northern side of the course. M'Quigg's tee-shot had put his ball close to an obstacle of the type which figures with such melancholy frequency, not only in the waste places, but in the tilled fields of North China—namely, a little mortuary mound, consisting of a Devoe's oil packing-case, sparsely covered with loose earth. On the Tientsin course, as on the Shanghai Recreation ground of former days, the game derived a certain piquant flavour of Old Mortality from the graves, tombstones, and widows' monuments, which afforded almost the only variants of the flat landscape, and occasional hazards ; but on the windswept No Man's Land which lies beyond the northern walls of Peking, none but the coffins of the very poor were ever dumped, and these contained, as a rule, the pitiful remains of some unwanted nameless little one.

By the rules of the game as we played it, M'Quigg was entitled to lift his ball and drop it clear of the dismal obstacle, losing a stroke. But the pangs of defeat were upon him, and, hardening his heart, he elected to play it as it lay, and this, not prudently with a niblick, but with a forceful iron. No kerosene packing-case was ever made that could resist the impact of that shot. The thin weather-beaten shell cracked, as if smitten with an axe, and through the horrid breach the ball disappeared. Had I not been dormie, M'Quigg would no doubt have agreed to treat it as lost, abandoning the hole ; as it was, he turned his back on that shattered tenement of clay and pretended to be lighting his pipe ; whilst his caddy, a ragged urchin of the Ishmael breed, proceeded to retrieve the ball, as unconcernedly as if it had lain in casual water. Over the details of that quest I draw the veil of decency. The

boy having handed the ball to him, M'Quigg doggedly dropped again. Having played the shot, he then calmly inquired whether I thought that a penalty should attach to lifting a ball unplayable under such conditions? He held the view—I was at no pains to contest it—that coffins casually deposited on or near the fairway should, under local rules, be treated as ground under repair. As I won the hole and match with a couple of strokes to spare, the question was of academic interest only; had the issue of the game depended upon it, he was quite capable of referring the matter to "The Field."

From a flowering plum-tree just inside the enclosure of the Yellow Temple, a golden oriole was singing a rapturous greeting to the spring, the rippling *credo* of a joyful heart, unburdened by any winter garments of repentance. Farther on, against a dark background of cedars, the clustered chalices of a leafless magnolia glistened like jewels in the sun—goodly sights and sounds, whose healing virtue lured one to forget the grim realities of wintry wastes and squalid lives and little coffins on the desolate plain.

"Come on, Peter," I said; "we've had enough golf. Let's go and have a stroll round the temple grounds. And after lunch we'll sit and smoke under the trees and listen to the birds, or you can swap words of wisdom with the priest."

"All right," he replied; "I've had all I want of the damn game for awhile. Did ever you see anything like the way I've been slicing my drives? All the same, if I'd had a bit of luck. . . ."

"Post-mortems are barred. To every dog his day. Do you hear that bird, Peter? I shouldn't wonder if he is drawing his mate's attention to the

curious spectacle of two middle-aged individuals devoting the first spring morning to the ludicrous business of chasing a ball about with a bundle of funny sticks. Let's hang our clubs on a weeping-willow tree and hearken to the voice of the turtle."

So we paid off our gutter-snipes, and, leaving our clubs at the gate-house, made our way amidst the tangled weed-covered ruins of outer courts and shrines fast falling in decay, to pay our respects, as in duty bound, to the high priest. We found him in his private sanctum, adjoining the main buildings of the Temple—a little room all fragrant with freesia, daphne, and lilac,—where he sat, as usual, the embodiment of contemplative calm, surrounded by ancient volumes of the *vedas* and Thibetan texts. In the old days of the Temple's prosperity, before the Boxer rising, we had known him as one who had more traffic with men than with books, a sturdy pillar of the Church, one who had stood with princes in the gate and served as envoy from the Son of Heaven to the Dalai Lama. Now "the shrine was void, the altar bare." His latticed window opened upon a dilapidated courtyard, beyond which stood the famous marble *stupa* with its curved bas-relief, all mutilated and defaced by the troops of the Allies quartered here in 1900. Of a truth, the glory had departed. Yet there was something in the atmosphere of the place, and in the courtly serenity of the wise old man with the tired eyes, which evoked a profound impression of the undaunted spirit of man triumphant over evil destiny. As M'Quigg observed, the priest, and everything about him, were typical of the very soul of the East, of patience invincible, upon a fitting monument, smiling at life's brief shadow-play of vain illusions. We sat with him for half an hour, and he talked cheerfully

—first of the tribute Mission coming from Tibet, of the troubles of the Living Buddha at Urga, and other ecclesiastical matters, and then of his beloved flowers and birds. I was conscious all the time of the significance of the Buddhist ideal of emancipation, of the reality of that comfortable faith which is the Light of Asia, of a creed which regards life as restless foam on the shoreless sea of eternity, and death as a gateway on the path to Nirvana. As an antidote to the humours and vapours of golf, nothing could have been more effective ; to M'Quigg's ruffled feelings it brought the very balm of Gilead.

After lunch, as we sat smoking our pipes on the sunny side of an ancient cedar, at peace with all the world, slowly, by twos and threes, a small crowd of children gathered themselves together, silent and wide-eyed, their minds divided between the fearful joy of observing the foreign devil at his ease and the expectancy of crumbs from the rich man's table. There must have been a couple of dozen of them, all between three and ten years of age, representing the not-yet-labouring offspring of a cluster of tumble-down houses clustered around the gateman's lodge. Ragged little waifs they were, unwashed and underfed ; on all their faces the same expression of half-patient, half-puzzled gravity, which is the birthmark of a race born to sorrow as the sparks fly upward, for ever haunted by the menace of hunger.

"There," said M'Quigg, "you have the other side of the medal—the results of their fatalistic creed of passive acquiescence. It's all very well for our venerable friend to ignore the painful realities of existence and to talk of dewdrops gently falling into the shining sea of infinity, but I never see a

crowd of Chinese children without wishing it were possible to teach these people to regulate their offspring by the probable contents of their rice-bins. Human misery isn't made much less miserable by teaching its victims that their sufferings are the result of sins committed in a former incarnation. When you remember that, all over China, seventy or eighty out of every hundred babies born go from their cradles to their graves, and that half of those who survive can never be sure of a square meal from one day to another, you begin to regard their callous wastefulness of life and their indifference to death in a new light. Look at those poor little devils—not a toy, and hardly the ghost of a laugh among them."

"And don't forget that our worthy missionaries are doing their best to intensify the struggle for survival by means of foundling institutions and medical science. I see that one American society alone expects to save a million lives simply by teaching them that flies are carriers of disease germs, and that drinking-water must be boiled."

"Ay, but they never ask where the food is to come from for their extra million, or for any of the other millions who die every year from want of it. Unless they can resuscitate the widow's cruse or repeat the miracle of the loaves and fishes, all their benevolent activities merely mean that fewer Chinese will die of plague and pestilence and so many more of famine. The patriarchal idea of unlimited paternity was all very well for Noah and his passengers, but since the days of Confucius it has simply resulted in a perfectly horrible infant mortality. Wherever you go, from Kalgan to Canton, you will find signs and proof of a ruthless ceaseless slaughter of the innocents. That pitiful little coffin, dumped

yonder on the plain, is more than many of them ever get."

" You're right. The gruesome work which the Black Cart does every morning for Peking goes on, in one form or another, all over the land."

" And as for cold-blooded callousness, did ever you see anything like the way that caddy of mine started rooting and grubbing for the ball ? "

" *Quod fecit per alium,*" I murmured. " It was certainly pretty ghoulish. But perhaps there is something about golf that's destructive even of a caddy's finer feelings ? "

" A body blow," Peter admitted. " You needn't rub it in. I know I should have stopped the little monster. But what good would it have done ? He'd only have gone back later and retrieved the ball, to sell to me another day."

While we talked, our juvenile audience, increasing in numbers, had gradually been drawing nearer, all stolidly silent, with solemn eyes of covetousness fixed on our empty bottles and the meagre remnants of our meal. Some of the smaller ones were still wearing several layers of the cotton-wadded rags gradually accumulated (and sewn) upon their little bodies as winter advanced ; not even M'Quigg's Boer tobacco could alleviate the pungent discomfort of their closer advances. We therefore made a bundle of everything that was left, and, giving it to the largest female infant, bade them all begone and discuss the matter of distribution somewhere else. So they went, and in a little while high words and sounds of woe were borne to us upon the breeze.

" Talking of callousness," said M'Quigg, lighting another pipe, " that grisly business of this morning reminds me of another experience with a coffin which opened my eyes to some of the grim

realities underlying the struggle for existence in this country.

" It happened a good many years ago, when I was in the Customs and serving at Hankow. I had got a new pony and was trying to teach him to jump. One afternoon I was riding along the river's bank, somewhere in the neighbourhood of the present Japanese Concession, and putting him at such banks and ditches as there were. The river was very low that winter. It was the year of the great drought, and refugees from the famine districts in Kiangsu were making for the upper Yangtsze ; you could buy a baby—even a boy—for fifty cents. Well, as I was looking for jumps, I caught sight of one just about the right size and height ahead of me on the foreshore—a bit of No Man's Land that in the flood season would probably be under water. It was, as I saw, a newly-made grave, the coffin covered with a little loose earth and sunk a few inches only into the soil. I remember that as I put the pony at it I wondered in a vague sort of way at anyone putting a grave in such a place.

" Well, the pony baulked and finally scrambled at the jump ; and in getting over it somehow one of his hind-legs caught the lid of the coffin and crashed through it as if it were made of paper. The animal thereupon bolted, and galloped half a mile before I pulled him up. I then turned back, intending to put him at the jump again, when, looking in the direction of the grave, to my amazement and horror I saw, protruding from the hole which the pony's hoof had made, a ghostly hand and arm feebly beckoning to the world at large. I tell you it gave me the shivers, and my first instinct was to bolt. However, I got off, hitched the pony

to a tree, and proceeded to investigate. The arm, still beckoning, had been followed by another ; and as I began to enlarge the opening a faint voice from the interior cried for help. The thin pine boards were easily dealt with, and in a minute or two I had the lid off—revealing, amidst a tangle of coarse cerements and loose earth, a wretched creature, miserably emaciated but undeniably alive, and apparently about thirty years of age. Disentangled from his sackcloth, he sat up and expressed a strong desire for food and drink ; also to go home. His name, he said, was Sheng, and his father was a *shupan*, or native clerk, in the Customs. He knew that he had been ill in his father's house, but did not remember anything about losing consciousness ; he only realised that he had been buried when he awoke to find himself cabined and confined in that narrow bed which I had so suddenly disturbed.

" I left him sitting up in his coffin, his legs still swathed in his shroud, while I went to the nearest village to try and get the poor devil some food and find a messenger to carry word to his parents and fetch a chair or other conveyance. I was able to buy some boiled rice and sweet potatoes, and to dispatch a youngster to the city, bidding Sheng senior come out and welcome his resurrected son ; but although the whole village speedily gathered around the coffin and watched its occupant devour the food, not one of them would come near " the ghost," or paid any attention to his piteous appeals to be released from the durance of the dead. A buried man, in all their experience, was a dead man ; and if he wasn't, it was the family's business and not theirs. No good ever came from meddling with corpses or ghosts. So I gave the poor wretch a cigarette, and advised him to wait patiently until

his people arrived. The cigarette, which he smoked sitting up in his coffin, seemed to afford him more comfort than my advice.

"In about an hour the messenger came back. He had told the tale, not only to the elder Mr. Sheng, as I had bidden him, but to every one he met by the way, with the result that already hundreds of curious folk were streaming out from the city to see a sight so rare as that of a talking ghost. But the Sheng family were not among the sight-seers. The father acknowledged that the coffin was that of his recently buried son, who had died of an epileptic fit a week before, but advised all and sundry to pay no attention to the ghost, and to put back the body as they found it. To many of the spectators this advice seemed sound enough. Ghosts are notoriously tricky in their ways ; and in any case, if a father declared that his son is dead, there's an end to the business. If I hadn't been there, and if Père Etienne of the Missions Étrangères hadn't turned up at the right moment, they might easily have buried the poor devil again. As it was, after he had sat in his coffin for several hours more, Père Etienne succeeded in persuading a neighbouring temple to receive the ghost as our paying guest, pending further arrangements. As his own family absolutely refused to have anything to do with him, the Mission people finally had to find him a coolie's job somewhere. His father's decision in the matter was inspired not so much by prejudice about ghosts as by the fact that, being an epileptic and feeble-minded, his son had become a source of expense instead of a prop of maintenance. But the incident gave me, for the first time, an idea of the mentality produced by the reckless over-production and ruthless scrapping of human life which, humanly speak-

ing, remains a weak spot in the wisest and strongest social system ever produced by humanity. And now it's getting on for tea-time ; let's go."

As we passed the gate-house I caught in its murky recesses a fleeting glimpse of M'Quigg's caddy. Then from its depths there emerged an abject-looking creature, a thing of rags and wretchedness, who came sidling towards us.

"*Lao nin chia,*" he whined, addressing M'Quigg. "I delay your Excellencies. But the *tajen* will forgive me, for that of which I speak, though a small matter, is serious for a poor man. It was all an accident, I know, and no fault of the *tajen*, this destruction of my little daughter's humble grave. . . ."

"I knew it before he said a word," observed M'Quigg. "It was too good a chance to miss."

"The penalty for lifting one's ball is sometimes postponed," I observed. "Of course it's not his grave, but it looks like a case of 'pay up and look sweet.'"

M'Quigg spoke softly, as one should to a parent bereaved—

"True," he said, "it was an unfortunate accident. We will see to it. But tell me first, what is your name, and what business brings you to the gate-house of the Temple ?"

The shifty-eyed rogue, visibly heartened by the prospect of compensatory cash, replied that his insignificant name was Liu, and his wretched occupation that of water-coolie. The gate-keeper was his cousin. He would not have dared to trouble us with this matter had he not known of the *tajen's* generous benevolence. It would be necessary to replace the broken coffin with a new packing-case, and that speedily.

M'Quigg gently dammed the flowing tide of words. "How much will it cost to put all things in order," he asked.

"*Tajen*, it is not easy to say. The price of packing-cases has risen. Probably for five dollars . . ."

"For five dollars, thou mud-baked counterfeit of a man, I could buy your whole family. And now, since you say that the grave over yonder is yours, tell me how came you to put it on land which does not belong to you, and why did you not bury the coffin decently?"

"It is common land," whined the wretch.

"And you a common rogue," retorted M'Quigg. "I have no belief in this tale of your little daughter. Nevertheless, an injury has been done, and it must be repaired. I will give you two dollars to buy a new coffin, and another one for your trouble, but only when the grave has been removed to some spot other than our ball-playing ground. And if ever another coffin appears on that ground, my friend, it will mean big trouble for you and your family, including that turtle's egg, your son, who carried my bag to-day."

'Twas an arrow shot into the air, but it struck the right spot. The native mind was obviously impressed by this foreigner's devilish perspicacity.

"I will see that the grave is removed," he said.

"All right," said M'Quigg. "If it has been done when next I come, you shall have the three dollars." The scarecrow shuffled back towards the gate-house.

"Observe," said M'Quigg, "that if we had simply paid for a new coffin, the course would have rapidly become a pauper's cemetery, maintained by our charitable contributions."

As we rode out towards the Anting Gate, the oriole's evensong was throbbing with the joy of that never-never land where youth and beauty and loving-kindness abide for ever. Far overhead, like a broad arrow speeding to its mark, a phalanx of wild geese was heading for the silent places of Mongolia or Saghalien, wonderful in their mysterious purpose and disciplined precision. Slowly towards the western hills the sun was setting, splendid and serene.

## OF LITTLE MINISTERS AND DAI NIPPON

BECAUSE of the hebetating influence of its environment and the nature of most of its constituent elements, the Diplomatic Body at Peking was, in the days of which I write, curiously unrepresentative of the collective wisdom of Europe and America in Asia. Whatever it may be now, from 1900 to 1910 the battlemented enclosure of the Legations was, politically speaking, a *salle des pas perdus*, and the very home of the lotus. The *ex cathedra* utterances of the Doyen usually revealed a state of mind preoccupied with the nice wording of protocols and shibboleths of diplomatic procedure, rather than with the distant drums of forces gathering towards Armageddon. Their Excellencies lived and moved in a little world of their own, pleasantly detached from the realities of life, even that great tide of Chinese life which flowed at their very gates. M'Quigg used to compare them to children picking flowers and chasing butterflies on the banks of a great river, all unconcerned as to its source and distant wanderings. It was natural, if not inevitable, that this should be so, for beyond the narrow limits of the Legation quarter there was scarcely anything to distract their attention from the trivial things that made up their little days—no theatres, no stock exchange, no daily press. Therefore in Peking, even more than in Constantinople, the

Diplomatic Body was compelled to take itself, *faute de mieux*, very seriously, to make mountains of the mole-hills of etiquette, social precedence and ceremonial, and thus gradually to develop an exaggerated sense of the dignity and importance of these things.

Thus occupied, it seldom concerned itself with dull and sordid matters of trade. Rather it kept the trader at arm's length, referring him loftily to commercial attachés and Consuls ; at the same time it was ever watchful to prevent these lesser lights from usurping any diplomatic functions, or displaying any independent initiative. Political Finance the Legations were compelled to endure, China being a borrower and the cosmopolitan financier a power behind most Thrones ; but they contrived to make of it a leisurely and dignified game, and played it in the grand manner, ever mindful of the fact that the winners might look for reward, in the shape of decorations and translation with promotion to some other sphere, to the real world of Conferences, Courts and *salons*, of principalities and processions.

I remember an occasion when M'Quigg held forth with eloquence and great wealth of illustrative detail on this subject. It was in the autumn of 1906, an afternoon when Cantegril of the Alsatian Bank and I accompanied him to a solemn function at the Zoological Gardens, given by the Ministers of the Waiwupu, in honour of the official visit of Prince Fushimi. The pomps and ceremonies attending the entertainment of his Highness had greatly fluttered the Legation dovecots, not only because of its political significance as an outward and visible sign of Japan's newly-won position as a great Power, but also, and even more so, because

an unusually violent storm had arisen in the diplomatic tea-cup in connection with this Zoological Garden party. To make a long and acrimonious story short, the *Quartier* had for several days been feverishly excited, and divided into two violently argumentative camps, because of a proposal, which originated (if I remember rightly) with the German Minister, that the Diplomatic Body should attend the function, not in frock-coats and top-hats, but in a graceful *négligé* of lounge-suits and Homburgs. To the mind of the uninitiated, a difference of opinion in such a case might seem to be a simple matter, easily determinable by consulting the wishes of the hosts or even by the spin of a coin. But to their Excellencies it was no such thing : on the contrary, it opened up an endless and labyrinthine prospect of weighty problems, involving delicate consideration, not only of the ultimate ends of the Portsmouth Treaty and the Anglo-Japanese alliance, but the whole stricken field of international politics. Undiplomatic souls might have wondered why the fact of his Teutonic Excellency wishing to attend a reception in a Homburg hat should necessitate such prolonged discussions. If he and the dearest of his colleagues chose to go in *pickelhaubes*, why not ? But such notions could only be entertained by unsophisticated persons, ignorant or forgetful of the immutable tenets and traditions of *la carrière*, one of the first of which is the solemn make-believe of the Diplomatic Body's invariably united front and precise uniformity of *tenue*. To an orthodox diplomat, the suggestion of Homburg hats at an official function might be distasteful ; but once it had been officially promulgated in due form, it became inevitably a matter for formal discussion and decision, the idea of any individual initiative

or discretion in the matter of raiment or ritual being unthinkable. Top-hats or Homburgs—the issue was joined, and must be decided on Medes-and-Persians lines. So for days the chit-coolies bore confidential messages, marked "urgent," from one Legation to another, and the air was filled with conflicting rumours. In support of the Homburg faction it was adroitly put about that the Chinese would by no means be displeased if the attitude of their Excellencies on this occasion were marked by a *soupçon*, just a suggestion, of *sans gêne*. Had not Prince Ching given them a discreet lead and an indication of his feelings by being too unwell to meet the Japanese envoy at the railway station? China had been badly let down in the matter of the Portsmouth Treaty—her sovereignty in Manchuria was obviously threatened—and a lot more to the same effect. Thus top-hats and Homburgs became gradually the oriflammes of two opposing camps, neither of which cared a jot about China's sovereignty, but in both of which Japan's claim to a reversion of Russia's Manchurian estate was vaguely recognised as a new and serious feature of the Far Eastern question. In the end, if rumour spake truly, the matter was referred to a solemn meeting of the Diplomatic Body, and thereat decided in favour of top-hats by the Doyen's casting vote. The said Doyen, whose soft job consisted in representing Spain, *tant bien que mal*, at the court of Kuang Hsü, was a cheery laughter-loving soul, who knew and cared far more about a good dinner and a game of cards than about political stratagems and manœuvres. He had accompanied his vote, in favour of frills and formality, by a speech which, in the matter of sonorous platitudes, left nothing to be desired; but it came to be generally understood, as the

result of his confidences to cronies at the Club, that this weighty decision was really inspired by the fact that his own Homburg was moth-eaten and unfit for public exhibition. *Enfin*, the top-hats had it.

Where a sending of princes was afoot, and the Diplomatic Body, as representatives of the rulers of the world, attended in its best bib and tucker, common or garden humanity might join the dance, but officially it was non-existent and invisible. Members of the Customs service, bankers, stray globe-trotters, journalists, and others outside the sacred pale might therefore dress as they pleased ; their headgear could never jeopardise the destinies of nations. M'Quigg saw fit to emphasize his recognition of this truth by wearing a grey sombrero of generous proportions. Furthermore, determined to do the thing in style, he borrowed Cantegril's famous two-horse barouche, all complete with its variegated *mafoos*,<sup>1</sup> and invited Cantegril and myself to accompany him. To complete the party he also invited Mihara of the Japanese Legation, who, as he explained, would lead us, if we were so disposed, by paths of privilege to the august Presence. Our appearance, with Cantegril and myself in comparatively modern toppers, and Mihara in his *attaché*'s uniform, was imposing and stately enough to evoke respectful *ai-yahs* from the Chinese spectators as we drove leisurely, by the Chien Mén and along the southern wall, to the Zoological Gardens beyond the Hsi Chih Mén.

M'Quigg, who had greatly relished the top-hats *versus* Homburgs imbroglio (and had done his bit, behind the scenes, to foment it), was in his best vein that afternoon. He regaled us during the drive with a number of whimsical anecdotes, illus-

<sup>1</sup> Horse-boys.

trative of the sweet uses of diplomatic etiquette ; and Cantegril, in the breezy Tartarin style which he affected out of office hours, capped most of his yarns with others in which there was no lack of Attic salt. Most of the incidents which they described arose out of the all-important matter of *le pas* and precedence, the etiquette to be observed in the rightful placing of seats at every kind of entertainment, in calling and the returning of calls, in the observance of national fête days, and the times and seasons for wearing insignia. There was, for instance, the droll tale of a stately banquet thrown into horrid disorder when the second Secretary of the American Legation discovered, between soup and fish, that a Russian had been given the place to which, by the Red Book and the ritual of priority, he considered himself entitled. Then there was the memorable case of the dispute over precedence on the card-box at the gateman's lodge, whereby the British Legation became divided against itself and disturbed the slumbers of Downing Street for months with discordant clamour of protests and allegations. Finally, there was Cantegril's diverting account of a certain tea-party, given by a Dutch Minister, distinguished alike for his profound knowledge of international law and for the frugal simplicity of his establishment. His weekly tea-fight, to which the elect had standing invitations, was conducted on a principle somewhat similar to that adopted by Alice and the Mad Hatter—that is to say, whenever a new lady was announced, those already seated in order of precedence descending from the host, moved up or down one place, according to the rank of the new-comer. On the occasion described by Cantegril, the pretty young wife of a French *attaché*, an *enfant gâtée* and no respecter

of persons, had brought his Excellency's fussy little world about his ears by flatly refusing to give up her seat in favour of a certain lady of exalted position, with whom she happened to be at enmity for purely feminine reasons. This incident was the beginning of two years of highly irregular guerilla warfare, wherein several Legations became involved and the dignified tenour of diplomatic usage sorely disturbed, even unto their Excellencies' bed-chambers. As M'Quigg observed, the perennial puppet-show of the *quartier* owed a good deal of its peculiar attraction to the fact that woman, however highly trained, is always liable to revert suddenly to jungle law. You could never be quite sure that one or more of them, bored by the pomp and circumstance of routine ceremonial, might not snap dainty fingers at the Red Book and proclaim their own independent rules of procedure and precedence.

At the Botanical and Zoological Gardens, where the magnates of the Waiwpu, arrayed like Solomon in all his glory, were assembled to do honour to the Prince, not a ripple on the polished surface of punctilious etiquette gave any inkling of the tumult of mixed feelings that throbbed beneath the glossy top-hats, leisurely strolling amongst the lotus ponds. Introductions to his Highness were performed with a solemnity upon which no hint of Homburgs was permitted to intrude. Everything was done according to ritual, decently and in order ; in fact, had we assembled not to greet, but to bury, the princely envoy of Dai Nippon, the proceedings could hardly have been more impressive. But M'Quigg, with his usual detached appreciation of the genteel comedy, enjoyed himself with all the gusto of a schoolboy at a pantomime. Impartially distribut-

ing the favour of his attention between top-hats and peacocks' feathers, he wandered happily about the gardens, sowing here and there, of malice prepense, little dragons' teeth of his own devising in soil that he knew to be suited to bring forth a delectable crop in due season.

At tea-time we forgathered with Mihara in a dainty little pavilion overlooking a lotus pond, such as the Old Buddha loved, and watched the performance at our ease. Regardless of the polite proprieties, M'Quigg produced an old black pipe, which he proceeded to fill with his pungent Boer tobacco.

"The chief interest of this entertainment," he observed between puffs, "lies in the obvious truths which it serves to emphasize, but of which no one ever speaks: notably, the fact that, so far as the Chinese are concerned, since 1900 only two nations have really counted as forces to be reckoned with, and, if necessary, placated."

Mihara, the Stormy Petrel, never missed a chance of acquiring useful knowledge. "You mean?" he asked.

"Russia and Japan, of course. To me, this first appearance of a Japanese prince on the Chinese scene seems like the little cloud no bigger than a man's hand. Take it in conjunction with another remarkable omen, the withdrawal of the British cruiser fleet from Asiatic waters, and you begin to perceive the shadow of vast changes coming over Far Eastern politics. They are partly the result of Russia's defeat by Japan, and partly because in future England and France are going to have enough to worry about at home to prevent them from hankering after new adventures overseas."

"And you think," asked the Stormy Petrel, "that the Chinese realise all this?"

"The few that matter know far more about the undercurrents of international politics than we give them credit for. They understand perfectly, for instance, the paralysing effect of cosmopolitan finance upon the foreign policies of the commercial Powers. They know that all the best-laid schemes of a British or a French Minister may be brought to naught, and all his bold words humbly eaten, as the result of a brief visit to Downing Street or the Quai d'Orsay by some exalted financier whose spiritual home is generally in Bagdad or Berlin. They know quite well that not only the causes but the conditions of warfare are rapidly changing, and that henceforward the only Powers in the East which can effectively emphasize a claim or back a demand, with force in the background, are those which are prepared to move armies across China's frontiers—in other words, Russia and Japan. All the others they can therefore afford to regard as disagreeable but comparatively harmless phenomena."

"All the same, Peter," I observed, "neither you nor they can be sure whether Russia or Japan is the better horse to back, or the stronger force to placate. Russia got the worst of the last bout, but when she threw up the sponge Japan herself was feeling pretty groggy ; and now it looks as if the Muscovite were going to insist on a division of the spoils, or make ready for another fight."

"China knows better than to back either," said M'Quigg. "Whatever pacts they may make for dividing up the territories which they both covet north of the Great Wall, China will stick to her old game of setting them by the ears, which generally works in the long run. Of course, if it weren't for America, and all that China hopes to make out

of the great Republic's schoolmarm idealism and lop-sided sentimentality, the old Buddha and Yuan would probably decide to put their money on Japan, or rather, I should say, they would allow Japan to invest her good money in China. They all realise, I think, that Japan is going to be top-dog in Asia for many years to come."

"What makes you think so?" inquired Mihara.

"Many things; but first and foremost the fact that your Government seems disposed to acquiesce in the White Races' Exclusion Acts. That Japan must expand, in one direction or another, is obvious, and the line of least resistance, which her rulers evidently mean to follow, leads towards Manchuria, Mongolia, and beyond."

"Do you really mean," I asked, "that Japan can build up and hold an East Asiatic Dominion while Russia is there, ready to fall on her flank and cut her communications?"

"If Russia had a leading class imbued with anything like the self-sacrificing patriotism of the Samurai," he replied, "I might think it a dangerous adventure. But after what I saw of Duke Boris and the rest at Moukden, I've lost the last shreds of my old belief in the possibility of Mouravieff's Dream. I don't think Japan would run any greater risks from Russia in Eastern Asia than we have run in India. But enough of politics."

He changed the conversation by directing our attention to a wired enclosure on the other side of the lotus pond, where a solitary specimen of Père David's deer and a decrepit three-toed horse were sniffing around their respective cages, hoping against hope to find something edible.

"This alleged Zoological Garden," he remarked, "is an instructive object-lesson in its way. It

illustrates the inability of the Chinese to grasp the essential spirit of Western civilisation ; also their pathetic belief that a constitutional government can be created out of textbooks and a new social organisation out of uniforms and imported machinery. As a matter of fact, it never had any more chance of surviving as a Zoo than one of those lotuses would have if you transplanted it to a flower-pot."

"Yes," observed Mihara thoughtfully ; "for the purposes of a Chinese Zoological Garden, a dead mouse would appear to be better than a live lion."

"Quite so," said M'Quigg. "The well-meaning individuals who persuaded the Old Buddha to start this show with her private menagerie, overlooked the vital consideration that the Chinese functionary has not yet been invented, high or low, who can be trusted to disgorge the money required to feed a lot of dumb animals. Even if some benevolent enthusiast were to put up the money, the poor beasts would never get the food unless he bought it and distributed their daily rations himself."

"The experiment," I suggested, "fails at the same points and for the same reason as their scheme of prison reform. The Western-learning pundits of the Ministry of Justice proclaim that they have solved it with a nice new judicial Code and a Model Gaol, but they haven't discovered how to make a local Magistrate or his myrmidons feed the prisoners."

"Precisely ; which explains why most of the animals here are stuffed specimens ; also why the two expensive keepers from Hagenbeck's, engaged on the advice of the German Minister, compounded on their contracts and went home. Nearly all the survivors, you will notice, are the lucky animals

that can live on grass, a commodity which the keepers and their families don't eat, and on which 'squeezing' profits are negligible."

"It is a great pity," observed Mihara, "that they do not think more of the honourable repute of their country."

"My friend, an empty stomach has no ears. This nation has been haunted for ages by the fear of empty rice-bins. The first article of their religion, for Young China as well as Old, is that every man should secure himself and his posterity against that haunting fear."

"It is a very interesting point of view," said our Japanese friend. "If you permit, I will write a philosophical article for 'Asahi' on Zoological Gardens in China. But if you are right, what about all the talk in your English and American Press of the great progress of political enlightenment and social reforms in China?"

"Froth and flapdoodle," said M'Quigg. "So long as China sticks to ancestor worship, combined with polygamy, she can have no more use for our political institutions than she has for grand opera. Her social system will continue to be that of a beehive or an ant-heap. But even if she is politically futile and incapable of organising military defences, this system of hers will continue to produce the persistent type of meekness which must inevitably inherit the earth except where checked by brute force. Look wherever you like, you can see the resistless tide of their surplus millions silently overflowing into Mongolia, Burmah, the Malay States, Borneo, and the South Seas, Mexico, and Peru. Nothing can stop them but rigid barriers of Exclusion Acts, with force in reserve ; and wherever they go they dispossess the native-born and wipe out all

competitors by sheer force of industry and frugality."

"That is so," said Mihara. "We Japanese know that as colonists our people can never hope to compete with them in Manchuria and Mongolia. The Russians know it also ; they want to prevent them from owning land in Siberia. It is going to be a very difficult problem for Japan ; for we also have surplus millions and the fear of hunger."

"It is going to be *the* problem of the century for a good many nations," said M'Quigg, "to be solved in due time by the survival of the fittest."

"Who can tell nowadays," I asked, "what constitutes a nation's fitness to survive ?"

"As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be," he replied—"discipline, wisdom, and vigilance. But here comes Cantegril, with a look in his eye which says homeward bound. Come and take pot-luck with me, and we'll continue the subject after dinner."

So Cantegril and I dined at the little grey house under the shadow of the city wall (Mihara being otherwise engaged), and over the walnuts and the wine discussed the world-wide struggle of the nations for coveted places in the sun.

It was one of those ambrosial nights which linger, ever fragrant, in my memories of M'Quigg. The wind was from the north, an eager cleansing wind that set the blood a-tingling in one's veins, and for the first time since spring old Kuan had lighted a log fire in the library, very comfortable to see. Out in the little courtyard, shadows moved softly under the harvest moon, and from far overhead came the faint mysterious calls of wild-fowl winging south—a night of nights. Cantegril, I remember, brought round a couple of bottles of his best Pom-

mard, explaining that he needed something soul-warming to counteract the effects of our afternoon's entertainment. Under the influence of this generous fluid and M'Quigg's port he became breezily argumentative and chauvinistic, as a good Gascon should. No sooner had we broached the subject of Japan's surplus population and her State-directed schemes of assisted migration, than he waxed eloquently ironical over the incurable hypocrisy of the Anglo-Saxon race. In particular he denounced the Americans, who close half the world to Asiatics and then send missionaries to the East to preach the brotherhood of man, and diplomats to expound the doctrine of the open door. M'Quigg got back at him with a neat reminder that France, after expelling her clergy, had not scrupled to use the Catholic Missions in the Far East for political ends as cynical as those of the Kaiser himself. After that he carried the war into the banker's camp by denouncing cosmopolitan financiers in general, and Monsieur Caillaux in particular. Their trade, he declared, was the most poisonous of all the evil forces designed by the subtlety of the devil or man for the setting of snares for the simple and the exploitation of the weak by the strong. The pair were well matched, skilled experts both in logomachy, and the battle was waged right joyously ; but the original topic of discussion was soon lost in a labyrinth of side issues. Intent on getting at M'Quigg's views on the future of Japan, I took advantage of a lull in the storm, due to Kuan's appearance with the coffee, to lead them gently back to it.

" To return to what we were talking about this afternoon, Peter," I said ; " do you think that modernised Japan will possess the qualities which

will enable her to survive in competition with the white races?"

"The question isn't as simple as it sounds," he replied. "What you mean, I think, is, will Japan be able to achieve and retain the position of a Great Power while preserving her own national ideals and distinctive civilisation? That, of course, will depend upon the ability of her rulers to maintain the old religious and social discipline, the moral strength which has enabled her to do all that she has done in the last thirty years, to use for her own ends all the applied science of the West. Lafcadio Hearn, you remember, in his swan-song, said that her chief danger would lie in possible moral disintegration, in the decay of the national ideals of chivalry and patriotism, as the result of industrialism and the accumulation of wealth and power in the hands of a parvenu oligarchy."

"In other words," said Cantegril, "if she becomes too American she will probably go to the devil."

"Put it like that if you like. What he meant is, that if the social misery produced by industrialism should ever lead to the decay of the Shintō discipline, if the religion of loyalty, sacrifice, and courage should lose its hold upon a hungry embittered generation of factory workers, then the heart of Japan will have ceased to beat, the soul of Yamato be dead."

"Do you think that is likely to happen?" I asked.

"Personally, I do not," he replied. "I think that Hearn is right in believing that the veneration of the Japanese people for their ancient faith, the cult of the dead and of the home, will prove strong enough to survive all their perils of social change. The professed scepticism and unrest of which we

hear so much are largely superficial. Shintō, the Way of the Gods, is a religion whose roots go down to the depths of national life, to the primitive laws which govern every household and every village in the land ; and the type of patriotism which it inspires, a sense of reverent duty to the spirits of the dead and devotion to the Fatherland, shows no symptom of decay."

"Banzai, Nippon !" said Cantegril. "If you are right, the Way of the Gods must lead before long to another fierce struggle with Russia for the mastery of Eastern Asia, and the exploitation of China, since Japan's territory cannot feed her people, and she is excluded from the White Man's lands. Friend Mihara was right : it is going to be a big problem for her, and the future depends on the moral stamina of the race."

"In all my many dealings with the Japanese," said M'Quigg, "the quality which has always impressed me most in their character is the silent indomitable patience which every individual, from the highest to the lowest, brings to bear upon any duty undertaken for the glory or the benefit of Dai Nippon. You remember Mihara and the Russian officers' mess at Kuan Cheng Tzu ? There you have a typical instance of the patience I mean, the kind which bears long years of exile and hardship with quiet fortitude, and with no assurance of reward other than a sense of duty faithfully done."

"Combined with this quality of patience," he went on, "you generally find an extraordinary tenacity of purpose, a relentless determination to achieve the desired end at all costs, and even by methods which aren't quite what we would call cricket. At the same time, these desired ends have often seemed to me curiously trivial in comparison

with the unswerving resolution displayed in their pursuit."

Cantegril, scenting the chance of a new battle, sniffed loudly and rushed into the fray.

"When you say a thing isn't cricket," he said, "you are really blaming it for not being English. My friend, all's fair in love and war, and for hungry nations there is always war *in posse*. The Japanese have realised that knowledge is power, and they believe in preparing for events which their knowledge leads them to foresee. You English prefer to be taken unawares, and then to muddle through. I suppose you think it more sporting. *Pour moi*, I admire the rulers of Japan for not gambling on the security of their country and the destinies of their people. I like the way they leave nothing to chance, even in small things ; as they say, 'there are many small stitches in a big design.'"

M'Quigg was not to be drawn. "I dare say you are right," he said amiably. "But let me tell you about two things in this room which always remind me of the peculiar patience of the Japanese. One is the soapstone paperweight on my desk ; the other, that lacquered stand, originally made to hold a pair of Samurai's swords, but which, as I dare say you've noticed, holds only one."

"Begin with the soapstone," said Cantegril. "I've often wondered what that sample was doing in your chaste sanctum."

"I keep it as a silent remembrancer—a simple little sermon in stone." He went over to his desk and picked up the paperweight. "It's only a bit of common Foochow work, but I would like to bet a hundred to one that you can't guess where and how I picked it up. It was one day about five years ago, when I was in Belfast and going to

lunch at the Ulster Club with M'Cullough, an old schoolmate of mine, now one of the big men in the shipbuilding trade. I had gone to pick him up at his office, and, finding him engaged, was whiling away the time by wandering around his beehive of a place. Suddenly, at the turn of a passage, I came across a diminutive individual carrying a bundle under one arm, and this bit of carved soapstone in the other hand. He held it out for me to see, saying, 'Please you buy,' with an ingratiating smile of such latitude and dental profusion that I was left in no doubt as to his nationality. At the same moment that I knew him for a Japanese, the thought flashed across my mind that he must belong to some Club of Queer Trades, for no man could ever hope to earn the price of a ticket to Europe by selling these cheap kickshaws. But when I asked him where he came from and on what business, he replied, 'My belong Ningpo man. Come this side makee sellum culio—please you buy one piece.' He had certainly got the Treaty Port 'pidgin' English all right, and, although improbable, a Chinese pedlar in Belfast was not an impossibility (I have seen them hawking their wares from door to door on the shores of the Baltic). All the same, I was sure that smile had never been bred in Ningpo. But the matter was easily tested, so I asked him, in Chinese, the price of his wares. *Tableau!* In the matter of his native land he had to admit my soft impeachment ; for the rest, he told me, in fairly decent English, a rambling tale about his being a poor student in pursuit of Western learning, forced to supplement his slender means by doing this hawking trade.

"While we were talking, M'Cullough appeared

at the farther end of the passage with his visitor—an old acquaintance of mine, as it turned out—Coghill, one time naval *attaché* in Tokyo, now a travelling partner in Vickmores, the big shipbuilders. My Japanese friend, seeing them coming, showed signs of uneasiness, and an unmistakable anxiety to be gone. He was, in fact, starting in the direction of the staircase, regardless of the fact that his piece of soapstone was still in my hands, but I called out to him, and he stopped. I bought the thing—he didn't bargain—for five shillings ; he pouched the money and made off, as fast as his legs would carry him, just as M'Cullough and Coghill reached us.

“‘ What's that chap doing here ? ’ asked Coghill.

“‘ He's a Chinese pedlar,’ said M'Cullough. ‘ Been hanging about Belfast for some time now selling those funny carvings of his. He came this morning to ask me for a permit to hawk them round among the workmen in the yards. Seems a decent sort of fellow, so I let him have it, though I don't expect he'll sell many of those things on the Island.’

“‘ It's a small world and full of surprises,’ said Coghill. ‘ Your interesting Chinese pedlar's name is Yishimoto, and his home is in Tokyo. I would have remembered him by the soapstone, even if I hadn't caught a glimpse of his face. The last time I saw him was about a year ago at Colon Bay. He was by way of being a Chinese pedlar there also, and very diligently pursuing his business among the Canal staff and the sailors of the port ; but unless I'm very much mistaken, that business has less to do with soapstone than with shipping and naval intelligence.’

"' He's welcome to all he can pick up on the Island,' said M'Cullough. ' But thanks, all the same, for the tip. I'll tell off one of the lads to keep an eye on him.'

"' I don't think you need worry ; I'm prepared to bet that Belfast will see this industrious hawker no more. He will fold up his tent, like the Arab, and seek some other hunting-ground, or I'm a Dutchman.'

" Coghill was right. The vendor of soapstone was seen no more in those parts. But he wasn't right in calling him Yishimoto. I found out his real name by accident two years later in Hongkong—recognised him in a group photographed at a Government House garden party. His family is one of the best and oldest in Japan. I'm hoping to have the pleasure of inviting him to dine here some day—every one turns up in Peking sooner or later,—and then we'll talk about this bit of soap-stone.

" Well, I think that's a fair instance of their self-sacrificing patience, of the thoroughness with which they pursue great ends by narrow ways. The other case, that of the sword which used to occupy the lower place on that stand over yonder, illustrates what I was saying now about the inflexible tenacity and the doubtful methods which they sometimes display for objects which may seem to us quite trivial. It isn't a very dramatic story, and I don't say that it's typical. But it's true.

" That lacquered stand, with two Samurai swords on it, was given to me nearly twenty years ago by Captain Seacombe of the *City of Nanking*, senior skipper of the Pacific Mail and the first to run between San Francisco and Yokohama after the opening of the Japanese Treaty Ports. The swords were not

a pair, but both had pedigrees famous in the annals of Japan. The shorter one, that which you see there, has quite an interesting little story of its own, which I may tell you some day ; but the longer one was a precious heirloom of one of the greatest families of the Satsuma Clan. Legends and chronicles traced its ownership back to Iyémitsu, the Shogun who established the Tokugawa supremacy. The two were given to Seacombe some time in the early 'sixties, as part of the price of a smuggled passage to San Francisco, by a young Japanese of noble ancestry, determined at all costs to see for himself the forbidden Western world, against whose ships and guns the swords of the Samurai had proved no better than children's toys. As you know, a wave of iconoclasm and of enthusiasm for all things Western spread throughout Japan just after the Satsuma rebellion, the younger generation of the clansmen taking particular pride in ridiculing the ancient ways and household gods of Old Japan. It was a wave that soon spent itself, but while it lasted many treasured Lares and Penates passed for a song from the palaces of the Daimios and the homes of the Samurai into the hands of foreigners.

" In due course there came the inevitable reaction of conservatism and regrets for the treasures so recklessly squandered. After the victorious war with China, the nation's martial spirit turned with fresh ardour to the ancient faith, and to reverence for the patriotic *Manes* of the heroes of the past. To foster and gratify this ardent spirit, the authorities at Tokyo set about tracing, and, if possible, recovering for the National Museum, some of the most famous heirlooms and relics that were known to have left the country. In particular, they hoped

to recover certain historic swords, blades forged with Shintō rites by master craftsmen in olden times, faithfully passed from father to son by generations of knightly warriors and associated with deeds of valour in many legends and popular dramas. Amongst these weapons, dear to the soul of Old Japan, none could boast of a more romantically splendid record than that with which old Seacombe's sprig of nobility had so lightly parted. There was an abstract of that record—the pedigree of the blade, and the most noteworthy achievements of its successive owners—on a strip of silk paper, closely rolled around the scabbard of the small dirk which fits in under the circular guard.

"When Seacombe gave me the swords, he drew my attention to this frayed and faded document, and told me something of the history of the weapons, as it had been told to him by Japanese scholars on more than one occasion. Also he told me that he had received several offers for the swords ; the last had been made by Captain Brinkley, who frankly admitted that the Government wanted them for the National Museum. Finally, Seacombe explained his reasons for giving them to me, and declining to restore them to the land of their makers—complicated reasons, arising from an exaggerated sense of a trifling obligation on the one hand, and on the other from a racial antipathy which had grown stronger with his advancing years.

At that time my head-quarters were at Shanghai, in a detached bungalow off the Sinza Road, beyond Settlement limits. The swords found a home there, amongst several others that I had picked up in days when curio-hunting in Japan was good, and there they remained for about a year. How the

Japanese came to trace them to my possession I never discovered—old Seacombe's 'boy' may have put them on the scent,—but they certainly did. The first intimation I got of it was a call from Taka-hashi, then Vice-Consul, who sent in his card one day and promptly followed it to the very door of my den. The ostensible purpose of his visit was to ask for an introduction to a missionary friend of mine at Hangchow, where negotiations for the new Japanese Settlement were in progress, but it wasn't long before he turned from that subject and began talking about curios. He confessed to a particular interest in my Japanese swords, and asked permission to examine them. I tried to divert his attention to other things, but he was so politely insistent that in the end I had to let him have his way. When he came to old Seacombe's pair, which he did with nicely affected unconcern, he held the longer blade in both hands and drew in his breath with the protracted sibilation of deep reverence. The surprise which, after examining the weapon, he expressed at finding such a treasure in my house, was well feigned, but his enthusiasm was unguardedly genuine. To make a long story short, he did his utmost to persuade me to name a price, or to accept an offer, for my little collection as it stood. When, on the spur of the moment, I told him that I had half promised to lend them to South Kensington, he got quite excited. He finally confessed that he wanted old Seacombe's two swords, and especially the longer one, for the Tokyo Museum. He would leave it to me to name any price in reason, and promise me in addition the Order of the Rising Sun. It went against the grain to refuse him, especially as I really sympathised with the feelings and the motives that

lay behind his quest ; but of course I couldn't part with the things, and in the end he had to go empty away.

" That evening, thinking things over, I came to the conclusion that it might be well to remove those two swords before they aroused further cupidity, so I replaced them with two others, and told old Kuan to put them carefully away. The larger one he hid in an old Korean chest which stood in my bedroom, the smaller one in his own quarters. A month later, when we were up-country, as usual, shooting over the week-end, my house was burgled. Neither the night watchman nor the other servants knew anything about it, of course ; they hadn't heard a sound. The burglar must have been in the house for a good long time, for he had thoroughly ransacked my den and every cupboard in the place ; but the curious part of the business was that nothing of any value was stolen, except that sword from the Korean chest."

" Did you ever mention the matter to Takanashi ? " I asked.

" Not at the time, for he went to Tokyo on sick leave that same week. Two years later, however, I met him at a dinner in Moukden. He didn't wait for me to begin. Without the flicker of an eyelid he spoke about the swords, and asked whether I had sent them to South Kensington. In tactfully chosen words I told him about my fastidious *dilettante* burglar. He looked at me thoughtfully, and observed it was a great pity that I hadn't accepted his offer. I am not so sure of that myself ; in fact, I think that the empty place on that old lacquered stand has an educative value even greater than old Iyémitsu's ' Excalibur.' "

" Cricket or no cricket," said Cantegril, " a

nation that can beat Russia and produce Consuls like Takahashi, while worshipping the spirits of its ancestors, is not going to be easily ousted from its place in the sun. Nippon, Banzai ! ”

THE END



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# SOMETHING LIGHTER



By J. O. P. BLAND

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